

Sami Adwan  
Armin G. Wildfeuer (eds.)

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Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

## Participation and Reconciliation

Preconditions of Justice

*Schriften der KathO NRW, Band 16*

In order to make justice work, participation and reconciliation is needed within and between societies, peoples, and nations. In this compilation, authors—senior academics as well as students—from Bethlehem University, Palestine, and the Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany, contribute to this important field. Thus, to some extent, the book in itself is an example of the subjects it deals with.



The editors:

**Prof. Dr. Sami Adwan**  
Bethlehem University, Palestine, pedagogy



**Prof. Dr. Armin G. Wildfeuer**  
KathO NRW, Dept. Köln, Germany, philosophy

ISBN 978-3-938094-85-3



9 783938 094853

[www.budrich-verlag.de](http://www.budrich-verlag.de)

Verlag Barbara Budrich

Titellabb.: © Vlad Mereuta / Fotolia.com

Schriften der KathO NRW  
Band 16

KathO NRW  
Aachen | Köln | Münster | Paderborn  
Katholische Hochschule Nordrhein-Westfalen  
Catholic University of Applied Sciences

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Verlag Barbara Budrich  
Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI 2011

Diese Publikation wurde finanziell gefördert durch den DAAD.

**DAAD**

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

wandel durch **austausch** ■ change by **exchange** ■

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem und alterungsbeständigem Papier.

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[www.budrich-verlag.de](http://www.budrich-verlag.de)

**ISBN 978-3-938094-85-3**

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Umschlaggestaltung: disegno visuelle kommunikation, Wuppertal – [www.disenjo.de](http://www.disenjo.de)  
Technisches Lektorat: Walburga Fichtner, Köln  
Druck: paper & tinta, Warschau  
Printed in Europe

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## The Joint Project of Bethlehem University and the Catholic University of Cologne

The Catholic University of Applied Sciences in Cologne and Bethlehem University have maintained ongoing relations since 1997. In 2001, this relationship developed into a form of partnership that has been regularly modified to assume an academic approach.

The starting point was the twinning arrangement between the Cologne and Bethlehem municipal councils, which commenced in 1996. In the early years, there were regular student meetings in Bethlehem and Cologne. When the German groups travel to Bethlehem, they stop first in Tel Aviv (another twin-city of Cologne) and/or Jerusalem in order to gain an understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the Israeli's perspective. During the Second Intifada only the Palestinian group was able to travel to Cologne. As most Palestinians are not permitted to depart through Tel Aviv airport, they had to come via Jordan to Germany. The German group for its part suspended their trip to the West Bank due to the events of the Second Intifada.

In 2005, the two partner universities organized their first joint conference in Bethlehem and the proceedings of the conference were published as a joint publication. Within the framework of the DAAD program for German-Arabic/Iranian Academic Dialogue, more innovative projects (an artistic project in the refugee camp, video conferencing, seminars, conferences and publications) were conducted. A new project on "identity and difference" was initiated as part of this program in 2006. This approach was used in interdisciplinary conferences with lecturers from both universities, in students' encounters and in practical development and research projects.

In 2007 a comparative research and development project concerning the situation of young people in Palestine and in Germany and concerning the subject area of life situations and the transmission of values to young people in Germany and Palestine was implemented. Lecturers of both universities had instructed their students to survey young people in focus groups in Bethlehem and in Cologne respectively before the exchange. The data collated in the areas of politics, religion, family, careers and also on strategies concerning interaction with conflicts, future wishes, concerning their assessments of their own life perspectives and their wishes with respect to youth organizations and society was transcribed, categorized and interpreted. The data and

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results were exchanged in joint research seminars in June 2007 and again in Cologne in November 2007 and discussed against a backdrop of a great deal of controversy in some cases, but in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The research results were then presented in November 2007.

In 2008 the exchange measures were continued under the keyword of "Participation in a society marked by diversity". The twelve or nine-day student meetings respectively (in June 2008 in Bethlehem and in October 2008 in Cologne) addressed the issue of how individuals with different cultural and religious identities can participate in social processes. On the basis of the development of their own identities as Muslims, Christians and Agnostics, as locals or immigrants, as members of the society's dominant majority or minority group, as members and supporters of different political parties and groupings, the students discussed what chances they had of jointly shaping society and how social work can support people in terms of their participation opportunities. The contributions of lecturers of both universities on this subject area are documented in this volume as well as the project on Religion as an indicator of behavior among Palestinian and German youths for the project that was implemented in 2008. In 2009, a group of students drafted didactical material for a Christian-Muslim Dialogue with young people in Palestine and Germany. They will continue working on this project. The focal point of Justice and Reconciliation then marked the conclusion of this project in 2009. Contributions of the lecturers' conference are documented here.

The interdisciplinary approach of the whole project made it possible to tackle the issues of identity and difference, participation and diversity, justice and reconciliation from different angles:

In philosophical terms it can be proved that the Orient and the Occident were always interlinked with one another and dependent upon each other in their history of ideas; there are different developments and at the same time there is the discovery that their own identity is jointly shaped by the other respective history of ideas.

In theological terms – it principally concerns the relationship between Christianity and Islam, which have common roots as monotheistic religions of the book. The differences cannot be denied and conflicts must be resolved. The problem of fundamentalism reveals itself upon closer inspection as a problem that can arise in all religions in principle and which must be combated.

In political science terms the questions of globalization and the erection of civil society structures are to the fore. The underlying differences in the placing of emphasis, characterized by their own social experiences, of Palestinian and German political scientists are often controversial and for this reason the dialogue in this field in particular can be seen to be very important. Collective identity is in jeopardy in Palestine due to the absence of an autonomous national territory, in Germany a new European identity has to devel-

op alongside regional and national identities and this is of outstanding importance particularly in view of the feelings of xenophobia that young people also harbor.

Different questions can be posed in sociological terms: How is the modern age to be defined? If the modern age is viewed as the binding objective between the Orient and the Occident how much space remains for the particular traditions? How are multiethnic societies organized in the process of globalization? How do societies deal with the discrimination of women and with ethnic and religious minorities?

From an academic social work perspective, Palestinians and Germans do indeed feel they are faced with similar problems in individual sectors (support of families suffering from addictions, in the event of a mental or physical disability of a child) and simultaneously experience how greatly the resources of the respective societies differ in order to deal with these problems. In Germany the professional social work field provides resources, in Palestine the extended family does so if it is still intact.

In educational terms the question regarding development of an identity in adolescence (who am I and who am I not) can be addressed as a binding issue: In Palestine pressure from the extended family can potentially hinder an individual's personal development, in Germany pillars of support that potentially help to form a person's identity can be absent (peer group, family, role models).

In psychological terms the question must be asked as to what extent psychologically stressful experiences hinder the formation of a personal identity and lead to forms of self-loathing and hatred of foreigners. Palestine – as is also incidentally the case in Israel – is a collectively traumatized society. In Germany the increasing levels of anti-Semitism and the spread of xenophobia must also be analyzed in terms of their causes that can be explained in psychological terms.

The university exchange program between the University of Bethlehem and the Catholic University in Cologne has always had an intercultural dimension. We can say that the work we have carried out in the past four years as part of the program sponsored by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) has brought us closer together as human beings and in academic terms. A sense of mutual trust has evolved. Dr. Eman Abusada and Dr. Inge Tiemann did a lot for this growing relationship. Dr. Inge Tiemann was an active part of the Civil Peace Work Program of AGEH at Bethlehem University which is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Crucial aspects of mutual trust have to do with power. Who organizes the program? Who has access to financial resources? The German partner usually procures state funding for the exchange program. In doing so, the danger arises that the Germans will have complete control over the program's organ-

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ization and finances. One of the main characteristics of dialogical intercultural communication, however, is that the partners address the issue of their undeniably unequal starting conditions. This is the only way they can agree upon mechanisms for coming to a fair, mutual arrangement for using the funds.

If this approach is not taken, the relationship remains asymmetrical. Then the project partners often follow very heterogeneous interests that are not spoken about openly during their cooperation. In the end, they part without having established a lasting academic, professional or personal relationship. But if the university partners trust each other, these relationships can even withstand academic, political and personal conflicts

We must thank all the participants that this has been achieved – those parties whose commitment has been clearly demonstrated due to the contributions they have made to this book and the many people who do not appear in this book but are very active in this exchange program. In this case we have to mention the names of Vice President Br. Robert Smith PhD, the former chairperson of the Department of Social Sciences in Bethlehem, Dr. Khader Musleh and Dr. Norma Hazboun, as well as the actual chairperson Nabila Daqaq who promote this exchange program for a long time; Ina Borkenstein and Melanie Bächle, who after completing their degree courses in Social Work organized significant elements of the exchange programs as academic assistants in the project office in Cologne, and – last but not least – Dr. Heidi Wedel, Ivana Olic and Bianca Schwarz, who made every effort to support us as contacts of the financial sponsor DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).