

SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG ARABS IN SLOVENIA

In the present contribution the author would like to represent the social network formations, the processes of identifications of the Arabs in Slovenia and the development of the Arab Club from the beginnings of Arab immigration to Slovenia at the end of the fifties in the previous century. As an anthropologist the author is interested in the experiences of the members of Arab Club and in the effects of social and cultural changes on them beside her primary interest in the fact who the members of the club are, when, how and why they have migrated. This has led her to the research of the influences on social relationships among people who come from the same cultural background.

Most of all information in the text reflects author's ethnographical fieldwork among Arabs in Slovenia. Contents of the article are predominantly based on interviews with members of the Arab Club in Slovenia, mostly in the period from 2006 to 2009. The author points out the historical perspective of the network's formation and its correlations with the state authorities (at first the Yugoslav and then the Slovenian). The first part deals with the part of an era from the Yugoslav history – the formation of Non-Aligned Movement and as a part of these politics the beginning of the arrival of the students from the Arab countries. The first part of the article is divided into subchapters: Non-Alignment Movement; The arrival; The residence and socializing; Organization of students' unions where the alliance of the Palestinian students and their connection with their homeland is in the focus. The Palestinian union is chosen because the Palestinians were organised the best and most of the Arab students were Palestinian in respect to their political situation. The second part deals with the formation of The Arab Club in Slovenia and the causes for its development.

Keywords: Arabs in Slovenia, social networks of the Arabs, process of identifications, Palestinian students union, The Arab Club

OBLIKOVANJE SOCIALNIH MREŽ MED ARABCI V SLOVENIJI

V pričujočem prispevku avtorica predstavlja oblikovanje socialnih mrež, procese identifikacij med Arabci v Sloveniji in nastanek Arabskega kluba. Priseljevanje arabskih študentov v Slovenijo se je začelo konec petdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja. Z vprašanji delovanja kluba in njegovih članov se je avtorica začela ukvarjati pred nekaj leti, ko je z družino tudi sama postala njegova članica. Kot antropologinja jo v okviru študij migracij poleg vprašanj, kdo so člani kluba, kdaj, kako in zakaj so migrirali, zanimajo njihove izkušnje in kaj socialne in kulturne spremembe pomenijo njim samim. To je avtorico vodilo k raziskovanju vplivov migracij na socialne odnose med ljudmi, ki izhajajo iz istega kulturnega okolja.

Vsebina članka v glavnem temelji na analizi intervjujev, ki jih je avtorica opravljala med letoma 2006 in 2009. V prispevku v ospredje postavi historično perspektivo formiranja arabske skupnosti in njene korelacije z oblastmi (sprva kot jugoslovanske in nato slovenske). V prvem delu obravnava del obdobja iz jugoslovanske zgodovine – oblikovanje gibanja neuvrščениh in kot del te politike začetek prihoda študentov iz arabskih dežel. Prvi del članka je razdeljen v podpoglavja: neuvrščena politika in arabski študentje, prihod, bivanje in druženje, organiziranje v študentske zveze, kjer zaradi najboljše administrativne organiziranosti in dosiopa do podatkov poudari Zvezo palestinskih študentov in stik z domom. V drugem delu je predstavljen nastanek Arabskega kluba v samostojni Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: Arabci v Sloveniji, oblikovanje socialnih mrež med Arabci v Sloveniji, procesi identifikacij, Zveza palestinskih študentov, Arabski klub

INTRODUCTION

As a student of ethnology and cultural anthropology a decade ago I was doing my first fieldwork research on the Middle East. Research curiosity about Arab society soon became a part of my personal life. My marriage with Jordanian Palestinian, who moved to Slovenia, involved me in the constant ethnographic fieldwork of researching Arab community in Slovenia. Establishing contacts with Arabs living in Slovenia at the beginning of my research was going on principle of the snowball,¹ but later on we² were invited to the Arab Club as members. At the social meetings of the Arab Club I was establishing new contacts and I opened new research questions: what is the process of creating social networks like, what is the meaning of the common Arab culture and collective identity of Arabs in Slovenia. The number of Arabs living in Slovenia was higher than I expected. Before entering the Arab Club I was sure my husband is one of the very few. According to the recent data of Census of Population from 2002, one hundred and thirty people have chosen Arabic as a mother tongue. The Arab Club administration data represents around one hundred fifty Arab members, who are scattered all over Slovenia. In the article I point out the historical perspective of the network's formation and its correlations with the state authorities (at first the Yugoslav and then the Slovenian). Most of all information in the text reflects my ethnographical fieldwork among Arabs in Slovenia. In the first part, I deal with the part of an era from the Yugoslav history – the formation of Non-Aligned Movement and as a part of these politics the beginning of the arrival of the students from the Arab countries. I have divided the first part into subchapters: the arrival, the residence and socializing, organization of students' unions where I describe the alliance of the Palestinian students and their connection with their homeland. I chose the Palestinian union because the Palestinians were organised the best and most of the Arab students were Palestinian in respect to their political situation. In the second part, I deal with the formation of The Arab Club in Slovenia and the causes for its development.

NON-ALIGMENT MOVEMENT AND THE ARAB STUDENTS

Interests of the former Yugoslavia in the Middle East started in the decade after the Second World War. The interests reflected in the Yugoslav publications which daily reported about the Middle East (from the exotic traveller's journals to the political analyses of the Middle Eastern problems). After the Second World



1 Husband's immigration experience and personal need of socializing with Arabs mostly contributed to meeting new people, my future informants.

2 My husband and me.

War Yugoslavia had its embassy only in Cairo and Ankara, ten years later in Syria, Lebanon and Israel (Petrović 2006: 7). Immediately after the war Yugoslavia acknowledged the independent states Lebanon and Syria which became republics according to the French model. As the Mediterranean states they had different perspectives from Iraq and Saudi Arabia which were oriented towards the Persian Gulf. Egypt led its own Mediterranean politics. At first Yugoslavia upgraded bilateral relations with the Middle East states after the fifties and that connected it tighter to the new Egyptian president Nasser. That was one of the reason that Yugoslavia withdrew from the politics of the two Superpowers' blocs. The main reason for the tighter bilateral relations was probably socialistic political arrangement. Yugoslavian politics criticized politics of Superpowers' blocs and defended the principles of an active peaceful coexistence which criticizes blocs' competition, the interfering into other countries' inner affairs, arming and regional army integrations. These changed standpoints of Yugoslavian politics were mostly the consequence of different processes such as Stalinization, destalinization of Yugoslavia, decolonization in Asia, formation of the Israel state, the Arab Israeli war, separation of the Yugoslav Communist party with the Soviet Informbiro (Petrović 2006: 10). When striving for these standpoints Yugoslavia redefined its foreign policy and came closer to the non-aligned or non-engaged states such as India, Egypt, Indonesia and other former colonial regions which were transformed into independent countries after the war. Tito took care of all foreign policy affairs and the international activities of Yugoslavia to his death in 1980 and he considered this to be an exclusively his area. The ministers of the foreign policy were only figures and formal representatives of these duties.

At the end of the fifties Yugoslavia stepped out of the outskirts and took over an important position in the international relations and together with Egypt and India it was the initiator and founder of the Non-Aligned Movement. They set a task for themselves - an engaged fight against the bloc's policy, imperialism, racism, Zionism, colonialism, and a fight for alignment with all the developing countries at the economic and cultural level. Those goals led Yugoslavia to closer contact with the Arab countries.

In 1953 The Committee for international connections established the Section for cooperation with progressive movements in the Middle East (ibid: 38). Yugoslavia represented itself with its companies in Egypt, Libya and Iraq. It also wanted to establish contacts at the university level and a rich correspondence in the archive of The University of Ljubljana is the evidence for it (The Archive, IV).³ It also emphasized the importance of intercultural relations. The states developed their relations on the basis of agreements on cultural and educational coop-



3 The Archive of University of Ljubljana; Fond rektorat, IV: Mednarodno in meduniverzitetno sodelovanje.

eration. There were commissions for scientific and cultural relations with foreign countries formed that encouraged interuniversity connections. Interuniversity cooperation had to be adjusted to economic cooperation (the Committee for economic foreign relations took care of that).

THE ARRIVAL OF STUDENTS

Yugoslavia with its policy of non-alignment and scholarships enabled the arrival of Arab students to Yugoslav universities.⁴ A Committee for Study of Slovenian minorities and foreign citizens⁵ was established at the University of Ljubljana. The Committee arranged matters of foreign students in connection with the registration to college or to master degree levels of studying and it also arranged interpreting if they needed it. It checked their documentation, it verified its authenticity and the adequacy of their documents, it helped with the organization of the language courses and observed the problems during the studying of foreign students and the efficiency of it. The special attention was given to the students from developing countries; most of them came from Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

The students came to Yugoslavia in three ways: as scholarship-holders of their own countries, as the Yugoslav scholarship-holders or on their own expenses. Their purpose was to achieve university education level in Yugoslavia, go back home to their countries and help to improve difficult political and economic conditions with their education.

Most of the Arab students were scholarship-holders of their countries, the number of students depended on the needs of every single country. Iraq and Syria included building of new roads and buildings in their economy planning; therefore most of their scholarship-holders came to study architecture, construction and mechanical engineering. The states those were more agricultural such as most states in Northern Africa or Sudan sent their students to study agriculture, veterinary medicine and forestry.

From the year 1967 scholarships in Yugoslavia were only assigned by the Federal institute for international, technical, educational and cultural cooperation.⁶ In Slovenia there was the Institute of Socialistic Republic of Slovenia for the



4 Until the early sixties of the 20th century the Arab students were able to study only at Belgrade and Zagreb Universities, after that also at the University of Ljubljana and different colleges in Maribor (these colleges became integrated in University of Maribor after the year 1975).

5 Slov.: Komisija za študij zamejskih Slovencev in tujih državljanov.

6 Before that year also *The federal commission for cultural connections with foreign country* was assigning the scholarships.

international, technical, educational and cultural cooperation called ZAMTES. The institute prepared international programs of cultural cooperation with the developing countries. It organized study travelling of experts, their specialization, organized and controlled courses of professional education for the scholarship-holders from the developing countries. ZAMTES was closely connected to the University of Ljubljana in regard to foreign scholarship-holders.

The amount of ZAMTES scholarships was the same for all foreign students but the government scholarships varied from one country to another. Many of ZAMTES scholarship-holders got financial help from home. Some of the students came to Yugoslavia (including Slovenia) also on their own expenses. Those were totally dependent on their home. The students that came as scholarship-holders and the ones that came on their own expenses differed in their way of life here. The latter found private flats or rooms; most of the time a few of them lived together. ZAMTES students lived on the student campuses and as temporary residents they had the same obligations and the same rights as other students.

Students came into first contacts with each other at the Slovenian language courses. Some of them travelled to Ljubljana together. They came through Turkey to Belgrade where the representatives of the organization which took care of foreign students and the representatives of the embassies have been waiting for them. They took them to dinner and then they drove to Ljubljana by train.

At the language course they first met a larger number of foreign students from the whole Arab world (and from some other parts as well).⁷ They also had some problems with dialects from different Arabic countries (Moroccan to Iraqi) at the beginning. Therefore they first communicated in literary Arabic language. But slowly the obstacles went away. They got acquainted with each other and with the schoolmates of the same year in the first school year. This relationship was becoming more and more professional – during studying, borrowing notes, helping with studying and only later on they developed some closer friendships. Students took part in different spare time activities such as mountain clubs and other sport clubs. Karate and football were very popular sports among Arab students.

RESIDENCE, COMPANY

Students were accommodated in the student campuses or in private flats. But decoration of the rooms was very similar. The rooms were mostly equipped and decorated with the objects that reminded them of home: pictures, wall-



⁷ The main connections which the University of Ljubljana had with developing countries were the students from African, Asian and Latin American countries.

papers with oriental landscape, religious extracts, maps of Palestine, calendars and shelves that were full of Arabic literature and Arabic magazines. Koran had a special place, because almost every student got it as a farewell gift. At the beginning the Arab students ate in the student canteen because they did not master shopping for food yet. Later on they avoided the canteen, they preferred to cook alone and so they were able to adjust their menus to the food from the country of their origin. When preparing a meal they put a tablecloth on the floor and put dishes on it and set in the circle. After lunch they served tea and debated. Arabic kitchen puts a strong stress on spices and the students missed them. Some of them adjusted to the food after the first disappointment. They adapted to pasta, potatoes and pancakes (Sallam 1984). Food preparation, exchanging of the recipes among the Arab students and the locals was one of the main forms of social life and an opportunity to keep company with each other and the locals.

Keeping company among the Arab students was frequent, more frequent than having contacts with local students because the Arabs had a need to speak their mother tongue. They borrowed books, magazines and cassettes with Arab music from each other, they shared their collective thoughts on their new surrounding, new way of life and their issues connected with that, they exchanged their experiences, helped each other with studying. The roles of teachers/tutors were taken by the older generations which introduced the younger into the society. Friendships between different generations were rare. According to the data of informers the students from the Western part of the Arab world (Northern Africa) and those from the Eastern part (the Middle East) were more connected with each other. The reasons for that they attributed to the influence of colonization and to the different cultural elements: dialects, food. The Moroccans and the Algerians in Slovenia were speaking their dialect or French. They hardly communicated in the literary Arabic language. There were also some other factors responsible for social non-communication: historical and political differences and students' clubs that united them in the countries. According to fieldwork information the political differences were the main reason for social non-communication of the Arabs. But there were also many disagreements inside the same ethnic group (for example among Iraqi communist and the members of The Ba'ath Party).

UNIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL CLUB

Arab students were organized into unions according to their national and also political affiliation and that was the beginning of the later organised Arab Club. At the time of the former Yugoslav state there was the Union of Palestinian students, the Union of Iraqi students and the Syrian students also started to form connections.

The Union of Palestinian students connected the Palestinian students in Yugoslavia. It was officially established from 1976 to 1986, the centre was in Maribor. It stopped working for two years (probably because the main representative finished his education and went home). They resumed it in 1988; this time the centre was in Ljubljana (Knez 1989). The Union of Palestinian students was founded by students that were studying here and the embassy of PLO which was in Belgrade. The headquarters were in Belgrade. It was subordinated to the main parliament of PLO. The head representative was the deputy of the ambassador of PLO.

The reasons for the formation of Union of Palestinian students were: the connection of students who studied at different faculties, solving of the problems of the Palestinian students, informing about the political news and events and an easier contact with home. They established contacts with other citizens, with the international club of foreign students, the United Nations Organization and with some political organizations in Yugoslavia: the Republican Conference of Socialistic Union of Working People. This was a condition for their existence and easier activity.

They did not have club place and they had meetings in the student halls where the topic of their conversation was mostly politics. Their financial fund got money from their own contributions; some older Palestinians who stayed here after finishing their education also helped them and were also selling their national neckerchiefs and badges. The basic condition for becoming a member of the union was Palestinian nationality independent of their citizenship, religion or political belief. They discussed mostly the political situations, how and why they would spend their money, problems, concerts and lectures. They also prepared lectures at primary schools and they tried to raise awareness about the Palestinian problems among people. They also published a special edition of gazette with the title *The Development of the Palestinian Question and the Palestinian Revolution* by the author Walid H. Juof, the Palestinian student in Slovenia. If it was necessary, the society got the money for its members to go home. The union also sometimes tried to arrange temporary or permanent permissions for staying in Slovenia.

Approximately once a month they arranged a cultural Palestinian evening. They wanted to open an Arabic school for the Palestinian children that had been born here with the money they got. At that time (the end of the eighties) there were more than 30 former Palestinian students who created the families in Slovenia. These families are culturally mixed (Palestinians married with Slovene women or with the women from other former Yugoslav republics). The families stayed in touch – most of the time they have lunch together where there was

always Arabic-Palestinian food.⁸ They wanted their children to know the Arabic language and the Arabic culture.

In the Union of Palestinian students they had more gazettes; the main magazine was the magazine of PLO (FILISTINI ALTHAORA).⁹ The magazines that were published in Slovenia were also sent abroad around the world. The gazettes were politically coloured. They were all financed by PLO and were free of charge for the scholarship-holders. Students got some other newspapers at that time and they were reading also the Slovenian ones. They celebrated also certain holidays that were politically, culturally or religiously motivated. For example they remembered the first victims that died in fights with Israel people, the day of PLO (establishment of PLO 1 of January 1965) and Ramadan.

They respected and celebrated also religious holidays, Muslim, Christian or Jewish – they remembered the Palestinian Jews that were treated as Palestinians by the Israeli. They also celebrated birthdays and weddings that were adjusted to the circumstances here. Most of the students wore badges with the Palestinian flag and the national neck cloths wrapped around their heads. They wanted to bring the Palestinian problem closer to broader Slovenian public and to raise interest in the Palestinian question. The union had a humanitarian role as well; they helped sick Palestinians and if needed, they helped in any other way.

There were also some misunderstandings (political, religious, professional and personal) in the Union. The Union tried to calm down and make order in the relationships among the members (unity – the power to fight for and deal with relationships among the members; unity means power to fight for the same goals). Bigger disputes were arranged by the embassy in Belgrade. There was also a rule that encouraged the students to help each other and also non-Palestinian students (lending money, tuition). Every union had its representative in the International Club.

The International Club in Ljubljana was an organization which united the foreign students. It was established in the sixties. Its purpose was to unite the foreign students from different countries. The club had a program which included several fields of work: 1. professional and educational activity (lectures, discussions, lectures of foreign students at schools about their countries, the organization of courses of Slovenian language for non scholarship-holders, an expert library, magazines and publications, publishing bulletin); 2. cultural and social activity (a reception for novices, commemorations to celebrate the independence of their countries, a celebration of the day of the UNO, an international evening, at least



8 Such as mabluba, mluhija, kufta, ...

9 The Palestinian revolution.

three excursions around Slovenia or Yugoslavia a year, several musical events); 3. sport activities (sport events, tournaments, skiing and swimming courses) and 4. international activity.

The Union of Palestinian students was in connection with The General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS). GUPS was established in the 1920's, when the Palestinian struggle began in San Francisco and is still active. GUPS is an organization run by the students, which has been a part of the San Francisco State University community for over decades. The Palestinian student movement was one of the first national Palestinian institutions to be formed. GUPS was officially launched in 1959 in Cairo, Egypt. Over 100 branches of GUPS were then established worldwide, with a total of over 100,000 students. GUPS has played a crucial role both in the Middle East and worldwide in increasing awareness of the Palestinian struggle. In San Francisco State, GUPS is dedicated not only to political awareness, but cultural awareness as well. One of GUPS's goals is to share Palestinian culture and history with the San Francisco State Community. Another goal of GUPS is to increase awareness of the Palestinian struggle for liberation. This occurs through such methods as teach-ins, panel discussions, civic involvement and protests.

GUPS supports justice and equality and works towards ending the occupation of Palestinian land. GUPS has adopted the following guiding principles: - it supports an immediate end to the occupation of Palestinian land; - stands in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination; - supports adherence to international law; - stands firm in its belief that rectifying human rights abuses in the region is necessary for justice and peace to prevail; - supports refugee right of return; - condemns United States financial support of Israel; - supports other movements seeking justice, equality and freedom; - supports the sharing of culture (GUPS).¹⁰

RELATIONS AND CONTACTS WITH FAMILIES IN THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Because of the conflict political situation most of the Palestinian population lives scattered around the world and the contacts are often difficult. But mostly they stay in touch with their families in their country of origin. During the time of studying contacts were various. Most of the time they heard each other on the phone; some of them weekly, some monthly or even more rarely. They maintained the contacts also through post, by letters, photographs, also by visits;



10 GUPS: (<http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~gups/organization/index.html>).

they were trying to find the Palestinian radio stations in the late night hours. The Palestinian movement had its own radio station which was called The Voice of PLO. The centre of this station was in Alger and they had branches of the station in all other Arabic countries. The topics were mostly political, they played the Palestinian music, they were talking about the Palestinian customs through the history and they presented the culture of the Palestinian nation. The purpose of this station was to raise national awareness and to acquaint the younger generation with their roots, the suffering and the fighting. Students gathered in a room in the late night hours and they tried to find a radio station which represented a contact with their homeland.

In different periods contacts were more frequent, then rarer, depending on the political situation (Arabic-Israeli war, the Palestinian rising). Contacts with home depended also on financial factors. Those students who came on their own expenses had to stay in closer touch with home; they were financially dependent.

They got photographs, cassettes with the voices of their relatives, recorded music from home. Some of the students also sent home some Slovene traditional and popular music. During the summer holidays they did not go back to the country of their origin on regular basis. Sometimes also their relatives came to Slovenia to visit them. They travelled around Slovenia and showed them sights. The most popular place to visit was Postojna cave. An important source of spending their spare time was shopping (visiting shops for cloths, cosmetics for women). The visit of the family also meant a temporary taste of home-made food because they brought spices with them. They invited some other Arabic students for lunch or dinner at that time. They also organized barbecues. Most of the guests stayed at Camp Ježica, some of them in hotels. They came to Ljubljana in their traditional clothing which they did not wear during their stay in Ljubljana. In their rooms, camp or hotel they changed into their casual, comfortable clothing.

The visits of their families also meant a certain pressure, a control, interest in how the studying was going. Parents also brought money for studying.

There have been some examples of students who stopped keeping personal contact with their families. Some of them were not successful in their studying and they had a guilty conscience.

Through economic and social remittances they brought changes into local places. Home and host societies become in such case a united field of social activity where different borders (geographical, social) can be freely crossed and they form a broader transnational field.

THE ARAB CLUB

At the end of the 1980s the Yugoslavian state was collapsing and within that also the policy of interuniversity cooperation with developing countries. The arrivals of Arab students stopped. The Arabs who remained in Slovenia after finishing education expressed willingness to cooperate and share their common culture within some organization. Immigrants set up organisations to create, express and maintain a collective identity. Such organisations are not only important for the immigrants themselves, but also for their participation and integration into the host society (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 823). By studying organisations we gather valuable information about the settlement process of immigrants. They are important for understanding immigration and integration processes, because the extent to which immigrants cluster in organizations is a critical measure of collectively expressed and collectively ascribed identity. Cohen says that the character, number and size of organizations indicate the extent to which immigrants want to profile themselves as being different, or how they are seen to be different by others (in Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 824). By forming an organization, immigrants fence off their ethnic or national identity from others (Marquez 2001). Relation between ethnicity and nationality is very complex, both of the categories are overlapping, the boundaries are often unclear. In spite of the similarities they are not outlining the same analytical concepts. But both categories are related, ethnicity can become a nationality or vice versa. Ethnicity ideology (but often also national ideology) reference to cultural similarities and to the common origin as well. By doing this, mechanism that organise cultural differences are set up and these mechanisms divide the members from non-members and they also formally regulate interaction between them (Repič 2006: 34). Breton suggests that three sets of factors stimulate the formation of ethnic organisations: cultural differences with the native population; the level of resources among the members of the immigrant group; and the pattern of migration. Breton, and many later authors, saw cultural difference between immigrants and the members of the host society as an important factor for encouraging the formation of immigrant organisations (in Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 825). But Moya shows that immigrants who are culturally different from the members of the host society have not set up more organisations than culturally similar immigrants have. Moya's critique does not imply that cultural difference is of no importance. He criticises the concept of cultural difference but there is a societal use of the concept (Moya 2005: 839–40). Beside cultural differences there are also other factors that need to be considered: the migration process, the opportunity structure in the host society and the characteristics of the immigrant community (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 826).

The Arab Club was established in 1992 as a cultural club with the centre in Ljubljana. Its members are mostly Slovene citizens of Arabic origin from many Arabic states/countries (most of them come from Palestine, Jordan, Syria,

Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Yemen). They have formal statute and the members have to pay membership fees. In other larger ethnic communities (such as for example Lebanese in Senegal who created separate Shi'a, Sunni and Maronite associations) religion prompted the formation of separate associational structures within the same national group. In this case the members of Arab Club are of different religious background (Christians and mostly Muslims). Religion is only one among many possible markers of ethnicity and not always the most important one.

The members are mostly university graduates from the Slovenian universities. They mostly speak two languages (Arabic and Slovene) and some of them organized their lives in two societies. Some authors would name them as culturally bifocal people (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999). As a result of the transnational social fields we can talk about hybrid and syncretism life customs (Faist 2000). The fact that they are bifocal and cooperate in global transmigration process does not erase the local identities and the character structure. Transnationalism leans on them to keep the transnational bonds. Therefore the purpose of the club is in the first place to connect people – its members. The members use the club as a social field with the purpose of maintaining their cultural practices, local identities and the language as an element of keeping collective culture. For the purpose of their activity they determined strengthening of mutual bonds of all members of the Arab nationality and the members of their families and strengthening of the cultural and club bonds among the members of the club and the homeland. In the international context the role of the networks is based especially on relatives and friendships bonds in the process of chain migrations. The networks are especially important in the receiving society because they create social capital. Elements of solidarity, cooperation and mutuality inside the networks are essential for the system of social networks.

The Arab Club is a totally apolitical institution in relation to the Slovenian state. It refers to itself as a cultural club, it is a member of The Society of Cultural Clubs Ljubljana and financed through projects from the Public Fund of Republic of Slovenia for Cultural Activities. The Arab Club is a club of members of the first generation of immigrant students in the time of non-aligned Yugoslavia. Today they are mostly Slovenian citizens and mostly do not like to be called immigrants but rather Slovenian citizens of Arab origin and instead of immigrant association they prefer the name ethnic association. In Slovenia institutions as well as the people have great problems accepting people who were not born into our society as real genuine Slovenes. In the contemporary society around the world, migrants are seen, both by the sending and receiving society, as still belonging to their country of origin, although this idea is stronger for example in Europe than in North America. This feeling is expressed by the use of the term “migrant” even for the second or third generation (Anthias 1998).

The same members were also active in the former alliances (dependent on the nationality). Olzak and West hypothesised that ethnic conflict encouraged group solidarity and cohesion. Solidarity in turn encouraged the founding and maintenance of ethnic organizations. When conflicts increased, the cost of collective action rose and the group's capacity for mobilisation was undermined (in Schrover and Vermeulen 2005: 826). So why does the club have a strong distance to politics in comparison to former students' unions? The area of the Middle East has proved to be an active area of conflicts (occupied land in Palestine has stayed a problem and a topic of every day discussion until today, conflicts in Iraq, Syrian-Israeli conflicts, Lebanon ...). Political intensity is not weaker than it was in the past. According to the words of members the answer is a simple one: the politics separated them in the past.

After the establishment of the Slovenian state the wish to start to unite again became stronger. The number of Arab students has decreased because the policy of immigrations has changed after the decline of former Yugoslavia. 53 members of the Arab community came to the first meeting at the formation of the Arab club. The opening started with the Slovenian anthem and finished with the Arabic song of children from mixed marriages (Arab-Slovene). The purpose of this new club was to represent the Arab people in Slovenia and the nationality at this point was not important. The purpose of the new approach was in the policy which united members of the same nationality and political affiliation in the past but it actually divided them outside. By establishing the Arab Club they wanted to bridge the political differences in the past. Despite the fact that they come from different native countries they mostly all declare themselves as Arabs in the club. Identities can of course be multiple (Povrzanović Frykman 2001): they can be collective, individual, "double" (Repič 2006), national, changing, situational, fluid, strategic and temporary. In spite of permanent (re)formation the fictive stability and continuity is the characteristic of identity: stay the same in spite of all changes.

Most of the people organise interactions on the bases of the category nation and ground the collective identity on it. According to Smith

national identity is not only global, it is also pervasive. Though there are some situations in which it is felt to be more important than others, it may also be said to pervade the life of individuals and communities in most spheres of activity. In the cultural sphere national identity is revealed in the whole range of assumptions and myths, values and memories, as well as in language, law, institutions and ceremonies (in Povrzanović Frykman 2001: 37).

National identity is a specific form of collective identity. The collective identity is based on selective process of memory, so the specific group recognizes itself through memorizing collective / common past. If the common past is too far for memories, narratives and traces remain but their representation is – similar to tradition which is also not the case of fixed receiving of beliefs- more the case of the daily politics and the way of how the institutions of power choose specific values from the past and mobilize them into contemporary practices. National identity is therefore in flexible process of reformation all the time. That is why some of the authors rather talk about process of identification instead of identities as stabile and fixed entities (Čepić and Vogrinčič 2003: 319). The Arab Club is therefore a place where members can perform their traditional primary cultural practice, the place where ethnic identities stay alive.

At this point I would like to mention two possible uses of the term culture: culture as a distinctive character between human groups and culture as a specific, with cultural pattern “stylized”, a whole repertoire of human social behavior, which binds the individual in the production of meaning. The two uses are in the mutual relationship of the reciprocal determinants; in the first case culture identifies the holders of the social action / in this case Arabs (culture is the framework within which the social action is significant). In the first case, the holder / actor “produces” the culture – culture wholly depends on the intentional actions of actors for its reproduction. Culture is what makes ethnicity possible as well as any other culturally constructed differences between people and therefore, it describes the process that is according to the anthropological description a classic series of collisions of “our” organized perspective when observing the “Other” and his “Otherness” and when the “Other” observes “Us”. Ethnicity as the quality of social relationships, i.e. as “an organization of cultural difference” (Barth in Šumi 2000: 21) can then be realized only when we are talking about the two groups in contact, who identify each other as being different (we only learn who we are, in contact with somebody else). According to Barth, ethnicity is produced by a manipulation of those cultural differences, which the holders themselves recognize as being socially importance (Barth in Šumi 2000: 22). Ethnic classifications may be disputed, as they often overlap with racial classifications. But I use the ethnicity at this point to imply common culture, because it is understood in this manner by the Arabs in the Arab Club.

The tool for carrying out cultural practices is above all the mother tongue, different components of club’s social activities and other social ties. As Moya pointed out – small associations actually represent the most common form of immigrant sociability outside of the family (Moya 2005: 835).

For the authorities the working of the Arab Club is regulated by the Associations Act (Official Gazette of RS, no 61/06). The state treats the Arabs in Slovenia (mostly with Slovene citizenship) as minority communities. But officially The Arab Club is not allowed to use an expression community (like Arab Community).¹¹

The response to the formation of the club was a rewarding one on the political scene. The leaders of the club had a meeting with most of the political parties which proclaimed the establishment to be an enrichment of the society. The club is partly financed from the state projects. The degree of support for immigrant organisations is strongly related to the legal position of the members. As far as they are declaring themselves to be a cultural club their activities are not regarded as undesirable. Soon after the formation of the club they informed the Arab embassies also in some other countries in Europe and they got a positive feedback; Radio Amman in Jordan reported about this establishment. The first chairman presented the club at the headquarters of the Arab league in Cairo and at the Ministry of Culture in Egypt. In the year 2008 Slovenia was leading the presidency of the European Union under the logo Intercultural dialogue. In this respect the Palestinian representative was also settled in Slovenia. He was present at some club activities and they agreed there should be more cooperation between the common institutions. Recently, The Embassy of the Arab republic of Egypt was established in Slovenia and the Arab Club also made an effort to get in touch with them.

As I mentioned before the priority of the club are cultural activities. The club organizes evenings of Slovenian and Arabic poetry, evenings of Arabian cooking and art exhibitions of young artists. They have at least three cultural events a year for the members. They celebrate both – some holidays from the Slovenian culture and the Arabic one (they celebrate the New Year's Eve, the end of Ramadan and have a barbecue to celebrate the national holiday of Slovenian state – 25th June). In the first years they had a school for Arabian language for children and folk dances, where members danced in the traditional outfits and they presented different dances. The interest in learning Arabic was decreasing with the second generation growing up. There was no further immigration of Arabs because of the Slovene immigration policies. According to the narration of the informants, there was some annoyance with the teachers / instructors of Arabic language (lack of time, unreliability, etc.). The informants also pointed out that they had logistic problems: while the Arab Club is situated in Ljubljana, a lot of Arabs live in other



11 At the very early beginning of formation they wanted to name the association The Arab Community in Slovenia but the Slovene authorities refused the name and they chose the one that already existed. They explained that only Italian and Hungarians can use the name community for themselves.

cities and they were not prepared or capable to drive their children to school at the weekends.¹²

In 1997, the Arabic Library, which has books from the Arabian literature, history and culture was established and this year it became a public library. They published also a club gazette *Do you know? (Hal Talam?)*. This is where the members were informed about the club activities and some interesting things from the countries of origin.

The Arab Club evokes feelings of community in its members which can not be felt outside the club. It represents a place where they can express their identity which is also collective. Migration processes generally determine the forms of social organisation, the question of maintaining and changing of identities and the relationship to ethnicity being always in the foreground. In the research of migrations, transnational communities and the formation of identities the concept of ethnicity serves as a label for "imagined communities".

CONCLUSION

In the time of former Yugoslavia the relations with Arabic countries were close; there were exchanges of experts, technology, culture – everything was connected to the higher development. The result of that was a higher number of Arabic students who wanted to go back to their homeland after their education finished. They were active in politics and they were united into unions according to the national key. When Slovenia became independent the ex-students who settled in Slovenia, started their families here and mostly became Slovene citizens, who wanted to preserve the Arab culture, especially the language; that is the reason why they established the Arab Club. They have overcome the political differences from the past and they have found a connection on the cultural level. The Arab Club is a place where they can express themselves through their cultural practice. Immigrant or in some cases rather ethnic organisations are an indication of how immigrants see differences between themselves and the rest of the society, or how these differences are perceived by others. By studying organisations we gather valuable information about the settlement process of "newcomers".

The principal stimulus for associational activity is thus derived not from the cultural backgrounds of the emigrants or the civic habits of their hosts but from a more universal source: the migration process itself. This process tends to inten-



12 But they were parents who were educating their children at the Arabic school in Belgrade because it was not such in Slovenia (that was still in the time of Yugoslavia state).

sify and sharpen collective identities based on national, ethnic or quasi-ethnic constructs. Being Syrian in Syria or Palestinian in Palestine obviously represents a much weaker self- and external identifiers than being Palestinian in Slovenia or Jordanian in Ljubljana. Because the host societies rarely receive immigrants from only one source, the collective identities of arrivals are heightened not only by contrast to those of the native population but also by contrast to those of other newcomers. In so far voluntary associations, by definition, depend on and articulate collective identities or interests, it is hardly surprising that migration stimulates their formation.

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