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ARTICLE

Muslims in Interwar Vienna: The Making and Failing of a Community

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This article explores the making of a unified Muslim community in interwar Austria and its ultimate failure. It argues that while the *Islamischer Kulturbund Wien* represented a visionary idea which aimed at establishing a Muslim community, rooted in both faith and Austrian society, it ultimately remained the dream of only a select few individuals. The association succeeded in strategically positioning itself as the representative body of Muslims in Austria; however, due to a lack of commitment from its members and the rise of fascism in Austria, this early attempt to establish a unified Muslim community in Austria eventually failed. By incorporating unofficial sources in various languages, including private letters, oral history interviews, and newspapers, alongside official archival material, the article amplifies the voice, perspective and agency of key Muslim figures involved, allowing for a more fully developed understanding of the internal and external dynamics of Muslim activism in interwar Vienna.

Introduction

In 1930, Dr. Zaki Ali arrived in Paris as part of an Egyptian government-sponsored medical mission. Little did he know that this journey would lead to him spending the rest of his life in Europe. In 1931, he continued his educational odyssey, heading to Vienna, known at that time as the 'mecca of medicine'.[1] It was here, in 1932, that Zaki Ali, along with Austrian convert to Islam Baron Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, Syrian-born pan-Arabist, Mohammed Ali El Binni, and others, established the first faith association for all Muslims in Austria, known as the *Islamischer Kulturbund Wien* (Islamic Cultural Federation Vienna). While its founders held high aspirations for the burgeoning Muslim community in Austria, creating a visionary association that was clearly ahead of its time, the Muslim moment of interwar Vienna swiftly waned within a few years. This is the story of the first attempt to form a unified Muslim community in Austria, and how it eventually failed.

The present article offers an in-depth reading of the practical aspects related to the making of a Muslim faith community in interwar Vienna and the associated challenges. The study contends that while the idea of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* was visionary and ahead of its time, it ultimately remained the dream of only a select few individuals. These individuals dreamt of a 'bright future of Islam in Europe',[2] aiming at rooting Muslims in Austrian society, and making it their new spiritual home. This vision, however, lacked the widespread support and commitment needed for its long-term realisation from the majority of the Muslim community. For them, Austria represented merely a temporary stop on their educational or professional journey, a means to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to improve their home countries and communities. The article argues that this fundamental

[1] See: Marcel Chahrour, 'The "Mecca of Medicine": Students from the Arab World at the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna 1848–1960', in *Strukturen und Netzwerke: Medizin und Wissenschaft in Wien 1848–1955*, eds. Daniela Angetter et al. (Göttingen: V&R Unipress GmbH, 2018), 487–510.

[2] Zaki Ali, *Islam in the World* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1938), 167.

disparity between the vision of the association's leadership and the actual outlook of the Muslim community was the primary factor that ultimately led to the association's stagnation and demise, despite its great potential.

The case of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* serves as a pioneering example of the institutionalisation of Islam in Austria. As the article contends, the *Islamischer Kulturbund* strategically positioned itself and was acknowledged by both Muslims and the wider Austrian society as the official representative body of Muslims in Austria. This makes it a direct precursor to the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (IGGÖ), officially established only in 1979, which remains the officially recognised council of Muslims in Austria to this day. The article demonstrates that, even though the association did not actively seek legal recognition as a religious community under the Islam Act of 1912, its outlook and objectives effectively placed it in that role.

Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of individual agency within institutional history. Although the study draws on various official state and city archives, which serve as a starting point to establish the necessary context, it deliberately goes beyond these sources. Instead, it privileges the voices and agencies of the key historical actors involved in this endeavour. By incorporating private letters, oral history interviews, obituaries, newspapers and magazines in multiple languages, including Arabic, German, French and Bosnian, a more balanced and more fully developed view on the Muslim community emerges. This is to say that official records typically offer insights into the activism, role and commitment of members based on the formal positions they held according to the association's bylaws. In contrast, unofficial sources allow a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the actual social dynamics and the degree of engagement of its members. Based on these sources, it becomes apparent that the fate of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* ultimately rested on the efforts of a few individuals, with a special emphasis on Zaki Ali, who I contend was the primary – perhaps even the single – driving force behind the association.

By delving deeply into the societal, cultural and biographical intricacies of interwar Vienna and its Muslims, the article disrupts prevailing oversimplified homogenous historical narratives and imaginations in both academic and popular discourses. It posits that Viennese public spaces and cultural landscapes were also claimed and shaped by Muslims. The exploration of the formation of a Muslim community in interwar Vienna, thus, serves as an illustration of the heterogenisation of space, thereby intervening in authoritative academic and public historical narratives that often limit themselves to homogenous depictions of space and society in interwar Austria and Europe.

In this capacity, the article calls for a shift towards a more global perspective in writing Austrian and European history. Europe's global entanglements have long been marginalised in history writing, which is even more pronounced in national histories, which oftentimes 'present their nations as almost hermetically closed spaces'. The case of Muslims in interwar Austria serves as an illustrative example of how 'Europe's religious landscapes have for centuries been influenced by global exchange'.[3] This article thereby aims to posit the history of Muslim community formation in Austria not as a mere history of the global Middle East or Asia but primarily as a global Austrian and European history. By adopting a global approach and integrating diverse sources and perspectives from outside of Europe, often in non-European languages, this research encourages us to pose different questions and utilise sources not traditionally employed in the field. Taken together with previous studies on the history of Muslims in Europe, this approach encourages us to reevaluate our understanding and approach to European history.

Lastly, it is crucial to clarify that this article does not imply that Muslims have always been an inherent part of Austria and Europe, or that they have identified themselves as Austrians and Europeans or that they were read by Austrian and European governments and societies as authentic parts of their societies. This would oversimplify the complex dynamics and patterns of identification, inclusion and exclusion at play. By asserting that the protagonists behind the *Islamischer Kulturbund*

[3] David Motadel, 'Globalizing Europe: European History after the Global Turn', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 4 (2022): 17.

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set a process in motion that aimed to establish a Muslim community within Austria, it does not imply unconditioned loyalty to and identification with Austria or Europe. What would this even mean in a period of rising fascism, prevailing anti-Semitism, and imperialism? Instead, this article suggests that the association's objective was to create the necessary conditions for a lasting Muslim presence in Austria, allowing active participation in its societal and political realms while critically engaging with its complexities. Conversely, European colonialism and fascism both had a profound impact on the destinies of leading members of the association and played an important role in its eventual demise.

Austria and Islam: From Kaiser to Chancellor

The Habsburg occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and the subsequent annexation in 1908 brought nearly 600,000 Muslims under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy after having lived for centuries in the Ottoman Empire.[4] Moreover, starting from 1888, many Bosnian Muslim soldiers were stationed in Vienna. They not only had their prayer rooms within the barracks but also had a military Imam from 1891 onwards.[5] In addition to soldiers stationed in Vienna or Graz, Muslim civilians also migrated to and settled in the Austrian lands. Recently published scholarship by Rijad Dautović revealed that in 1904 Muslim students founded the association *Zvijezda* in Vienna, which was the first yet-known civil Muslim association in Austria and at the same time the first Bosnian association in the diaspora. Internal disputes in this association led to the founding of another association, *Svijest*, in 1907 and later, in 1914, to the founding of the 'Club of Muslim Academics from Bosnia-Herzegovina in Vienna'.[6]

The most important achievement of *Svijest* was the establishment of an Action Committee to Enforce the Legal Recognition of Islam in Austria. This recognition was granted through the Islam Act (*Islamgesetz*) of 1912, marking a crucial shift from considering Muslims as non-denominational to recognising them as a religious society (*Religionsgesellschaft*), akin to established churches and religious societies.[7] This recognition came with certain privileges, including the right to public worship and state-funded Islamic religious education. However, to access these privileges, Muslims needed an officially approved local religious community (*Kultusgemeinde*) within the broader religious society (*Religionsgesellschaft*), such as an Islamic religious community (*Islamische Kultusgemeinde*) in Vienna. The outbreak of the First World War and the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, however, hindered the foundation of such a religious community (*Kultusgemeinde*) while the law was still in effect.[8] It was

[4] According to the population census conducted by the Habsburg monarchy in 1895, 34.99% of the 1,568,092 citizens of Bosnia and Hercegovina were Muslims, which constitutes a total number of about 548,675 Muslims living there in that year. See: Zemaljska vlada za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, *Glavni Rezultati Popisa Žiteljstva u Bosni i Hercegovini Od 22. Aprila 1895 Sa Podacima o Teritorijalnom Razdjeljenju, Javnim Zavodima i Rudnim Vrelima* (Sarajevo: Zemaljska vlada za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, 1896).

[5] Karl Vocelka, *Multikonfessionelles Österreich: Religionen in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Wien: Styria, 2013), 178.

[6] Rijad Dautović, 'Islamitisch Akademischer Verein "Zvijezda": Über Den 1904 Gegründeten Ersten Muslimischen Verein in Österreich [Islamitisch Akademischer Verein "Zvijezda": About the First Muslim Association in Austria Founded in 1904]', ed. Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien, *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 74, no. 4 (2019): 398, 402–6.

[7] A similar process of recognition was set forth in Transleithania (the Hungarian territories of Austria Hungary) with the '*törvénycikk az iszlám vallás elismeréséről*'. See on this topic: Orsolya Varsányi, 'The Recognition of Islam in the Hungarian Law of 1916 (XVII): Documents from the Vatican Archives', *Hungarian Studies* 33, no. 2 (Dec. 2019): 337–65.

[8] See for further detail on the Islam Act of 1912: Rijad Dautović, 'Der Völkerrechtliche Hintergrund Der Anerkennung Der Islamischen Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich. Zur Genese Des Art. 4 Des Protokolls Vom 26. Februar 1909 Und Seiner Bedeutung Für Die Rechtsstellung Der Muslime in Österreich [The International Legal Background to the Recognition of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria. On the Genesis of Art. 4 of the Protocol of 26 Feb. 1909 and Its Significance for the Legal Status of Muslims in Austria]', in *Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich,1909–1979–2019: Beiträge Zu Einem Neuen Blick Auf Ihre Geschichte Und Entwicklung*, eds. Farid Hafez and Rijad Dautović (Vienna: NAP, New Academic Press, 2019), 45–72.

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not until 2015 that the Islam Act was replaced with a new one by the right-wing Austrian government under massive criticism from Muslim communities and legal experts.[9]

Following the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, many Bosnians left Austria. The few who stayed, however, did not establish any notable associations or pursue rebuilding the pre-war Bosnian community. Consequently, the Muslim community in Austria underwent a transformation. It was now no longer predominantly Bosnian but comprised students, diplomats and merchants from various Arab countries, the Balkans, Persia, Turkey, Central Asia and some converts to Islam. Students constituted a large percentage of the fluctuating Muslim population, which ranged from a few hundred up to 1,000 individuals during that time. Aside from the good reputation of Austrian universities and their low study expenses, a major reason why Austria was chosen by students from Muslim countries is that it was considered by them as an alternative instead of studying in the United Kingdom or France, which were the main colonial powers in the Muslim world. Thus, Vienna evolved into more than just a hub for academic education during the interwar period; it also became a focal point for political opposition and anti-colonial activism.[10]

In the 1920s and 1930s, many Muslims in major Austrian cities actively participated in nationalist student and political associations. These groups included the Egyptian-Scientific Association, the Association of Egyptian Students in both universities in Graz, the Arab Federation in Graz or the Association of Turkish Students. In most of these associations, Muslims were organised along ethnic or political lines and, except for occasional gatherings for religious feasts, religion was not at the centre of these associations. Rather, anti-colonial activism and political opposition to the often pro-colonial establishments in their home countries were the primary focus. The German-language anti-imperialist and nationalist newspaper *Die ägyptische Fahne* (The Egyptian Flag) – edited from 1923 by Dr Muhammad Fadel, an Egyptian student of politics in Innsbruck – serves as a valuable and unique source for the study of anti-colonial activism in interwar Vienna.[11]

In 1931, Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds tried to overcome ethnic sectarianism and founded the *Orientbund* (Oriental Federation), which was joined by people who were interested in cultural exchange about the Orient, regardless of their educational, professional, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. The association aimed at uniting people from various faiths but also had a *Moslemische Sektion* ('Muslim section'), which organised religious feasts as an opportunity for dialogue between people from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the *Orientbund* aimed at creating a shared space where dialogue and mutual understanding could thrive rather than an exclusive Muslim space.[12]

In its official bylaws it was stated that the *Orientbund* is an 'interdenominational and supranational association, whose supreme principle is to work for the benefit of the whole of humanity by strengthening the Oriental element of humanity'. This section was then replaced by a summarised statement, which said that 'the *Orientbund* is a purely cultural association that values all religions and nations' and that its main task lies in 'enabling, promoting and nurturing the rapprochement of all Orientals and friends of the Orient'.[13]

[9] See in detail about the protest from Austrian Muslims: Farid Hafez, 'Austrian Muslims Protest Against Austria's Revised "Islam Act"', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 267–83; See for a summary: Farid Hafez, 'Debating the 2015 Islam Law in Austrian Parliament: Between Legal Recognition and Islamophobic Populism', *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 4 (July 2017): 392–412; Rijad Dautović and Farid Hafez, 'Institutionalizing Islam in Contemporary Austria: A Comparative Analysis of the Austrian Islam Act of 2015 and Austrian Religion Laws with Special Emphasis on the Israelite Act of 2012', *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 8, no. 1 (1 Feb. 2019): 28–50.

[10] Chahrour, 'The "Mecca of Medicine"', 479, 497; Walter Höflechner, 'Ausländische Studierende an der Universität Graz 1918–1938', in *Wegenetz europäischen Geistes II*, eds. Richard Georg Plaschka and Karlheinz Mack (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1987), 282.

[11] See on this topic: Marcel Chahrour, 'Politics in Exile: Egyptian Political Opposition in Austria 1880–1945: The Ägyptische Nationalpartei and the Islamische Kulturbund and Its Activities in Austria in the Interwar-Period', in *Egypt and Austria IV: Crossroads*, eds. Johanna Holaubek, Hana Navrátilová, and Wolf B. Oerter (Praha: Set Out, 2008), 247–61.

[12] WStLA, M.Abt.119.A32, 7048/1931, *Orientbund*, 1931; 'Der *Orientbund*', *Moslemische Revue*, Apr. 1932.

[13] WStLA, M.Abt.119.A32, 7048/1931, *Orientbund*.

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The *Orientbund* was joined by a variety of people. Its main driving force, Mohammed Ali El Binni, is particularly relevant for the later establishment of an explicit Muslim faith community. El Binni was born in Aleppo in 1901 and had moved to Vienna by 1921 at the latest. While biographical sources on him are scarce, what can be said about him is that he was an eloquent, well-read, politically interested, and deeply spiritual character, as well as a fervent advocate of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, women's rights, and anti-colonialism (Figure 1).[14]

Figure 1. A group picture of attendees of the 'Id ul adha event organised by the *Orientbund* in 1932; see: 'id ul adḥa fi fiyanna ['id ul adḥa celebrations in Vienna], *al-musawwar*, 20 May 1932.

The activities of the *Orientbund* continued until the *Anschluss* in 1938.[15] While it is indeed remarkable that Muslims in interwar Vienna established a forum for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, it's

[14] See El-Binni's lecture on the importance of women in Islam: 'iḥtifāl al-muslimīn fī l-nimsā bi-ta'sīs rābiṭat al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya' [Celebration of Muslims in Austria to the Inauguration of the Federation of Islamic Culture]', *Al-Fatḥ*, 22 Dec. 1932; see on El-Binni's political activism: 'Trauerkundgebung Für König Feisal in Wien', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 20 Sept. 1933, ANNO/ÖNB, Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, 'Trauerkundgebung Für König Faisal in Wien', *Moslemische Revue*, Oct. 1933; see on El-Binni's spiritual dimension: Mohammed Ali Binni, 'Das Gebet Und Sein Einfluß Auf Das Menschliche Leben', *Moslemische Revue*, Apr. 1935.

[15] OeStA, VB, 'XVIII 11586', *Orientbund*.

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essential to highlight that the association's primary aim did not encompass taking care of the religious affairs of the Muslim community or its representation. For such purposes, the establishment of another association became necessary.

The effort to establish Muslim faith communities was a common theme in many Western European capitals during the interwar period.[16] During this time, Muslims strived towards building faith communities and asserting their presence by the creation of 'legal', 'intellectual', 'physical', as well as cultural and spiritual spaces.[17] This was especially crucial as they were now religious minorities in non-Muslim majority countries. The most significant number of Muslim communities in interwar Western Europe could be found in the former colonial metropoles in France and Britain but also in Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.[18] The French metropolis had the most numerous Muslim communities, mostly originating from North Africa due to its colonial history.[19] Muslims in Central and Northern Europe can mostly be found in Germany and lands of the former Habsburg monarchy like Austria, Czecholovakia and Hungary.[20] Germany, in particular, became a centre for European Muslim activism.[21] There, the largest group of Muslims consisted of 1,800 to 3,000 students and a few hundred converts to Islam.[22] Among these people there were also anti-colonial political activists who sought refuge in Germany and also in Austria and Switzerland.[23] Eastern Europe, especially the Balkans, had a long history of a Muslim presence under Ottoman rule, dating back many centuries.[24]

[16] Some of the central general works in that field are: Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad, and Mehdi Sajid, eds., *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective* (Muslim Minorities, Vol. 17) (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad, eds., *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, eds., *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[17] David Motadel, 'The Making of Muslim Communities in Western Europe, 1914–1939', in *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe*, eds. Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15.

[18] See for Spain: Abel Albet-Mas, 'Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space: Religious Justifications for Tolerance and Confrontation between Spain and Colonial Morocco during the Franco Era', *Geopolitics* 11, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 580–600; Belkacem Recham, *Les Musulmans Algériens Dans l'armée Française, 1919–1945* (Collection 'Histoire et Perspectives Méditerranéennes') (Paris: Harmattan, 1996). See for Italy: Stefano Allievi, *Musulmani d'Occidente: Tendenze Dell'islam Europeo* (Studi Superiori; Scienze Politiche e Sociali 409) (Rome: Carocci, 2002); Stefano Allievi, *Convertis a l'Islam Les.* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013). See for the Netherlands: Klaas Stutje, 'Indonesian Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands and Beyond', in *Muslims in Interwar Europe*, eds. Agai et al.; Umar Ryad, 'Among the Believers in the Land of the Colonizer: Mohammed Ali van Beetem's Role among the Indonesian Community in the Netherlands in the Interwar Period', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5, no. 2 (2012): 273–310.

[19] See for example: Recham, *Les Musulmans Algériens Dans l'armée Française, 1919–1945.*

[20] Clayer and Germain, *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, 15.

[21] On Muslims in Germany see especially works by Gerhard Höpp, Gerdien Jonker, David Motadel and Marc David Baer, such as: Gerhard Höpp, ed., *Fremde Erfahrungen: Asiaten Und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich Und in Der Schweiz Bis 1945* (Studien/Zentrum Moderner Orient, Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin e.Vol. 4) (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1996); Gerhard Höpp, *Arabische und islamische Periodika in Berlin und Brandenburg, 1915 bis 1945: geschichtlicher Abriss und Bibliographie* (Arbeitshefte 4) (Berlin: Verlag des Arabischen Buch, 1994); Gerhard Höpp, *Muslime in Der Mark: Als Kriegsgefangene Und Internierte in Wünsdorf Und Zossen, 1914–1924* (Studien/Zentrum Moderner Orient, Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin e.Vol. 6) (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1997); Gerdien Jonker, 'In Search of Religious Modernity: Conversion to Islam in Interwar Berlin', in *Muslims in Interwar Europe*, eds. Agai et al. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 18–46; Gerdien Jonker, *On the Margins: Jews and Muslims in Interwar Berlin* (Muslim Minorities, Vol. 34) (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Marc David Baer, *German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); David Motadel, 'Worlds of a Muslim Bourgeoisie: The Sociocultural Milieu of the Islamic Minority in Interwar Germany', in *The Global Bourgeoisie*, ed. David Motadel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 229–50; David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

[22] Motadel, 'The Making of Muslim Communities', 17.

[23] Clayer and Germain, *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, 15.

[24] For the Balkans, see amongst many: Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); Markus Koller and Kemal H. Karpat, eds., *Ottoman Bosnia: A History in Peril* (Publications of the Center of Turkish Studies, no. 3) (Madison, WI: Center of Turkish Studies, University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Srđan Rudić and Selim Aslantaş, eds., *State and Society in the Balkans before and after Establishment of Ottoman Rule* (Collection of Works, Vol. 35) (Belgrade: Institute of History Belgrade, 2017). Maria

The *Islamischer Kulturbund*: An Austro-Islamic Association?

The foundation of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* is closely linked to the arrival of Zaki Ali in Vienna by the end of 1931 – a character who will become one of the most influential Muslims in interwar Europe. Zaki Ali was born in a village called Enshas al-Basal near the city of Zaqaziq in the Egyptian province al-Sharqiya in June 1905. He studied medicine at the medical faculty of the al-Qasr al-Ayni university in Cairo, where he completed his studies in 1927 and subsequently started teaching at the same university. At this time, he also published one of his first articles about 'Arabic Medicine and Its Influence on the Civilisation Process in Europe', which was a summary of his doctoral dissertation with the same title. In the same year, he was sent by the government on an educational mission to Europe for further specialisation in medicine and departed from Egypt in 1931. After a short stay in Paris, during which he was elected as a member of the French Association for History of Medicine, he moved to Austria by the end of 1931.[25]

In an interview, conducted when he was eighty-five years old, Zaki Ali shared his memories of arriving in Vienna. He asked around if there were any Muslims living in the city and was informed that Indian, Turkish, Afghan and Arab Muslims were organising within the *Orientbund* with the shared goal of raising awareness to end colonialism in Muslim countries.[26] Zaki Ali proposed to some leading members of the *Orientbund* the idea of establishing an Islamic association which would aim at creating an explicit Muslim space and addressing the needs of the Muslim community in Austria.

Zaki Ali recalled that before the official foundation took place, they gathered all Muslims they knew in Austria for the *mawlid an-nabawi* (celebration of the birthday of the prophet Mohammed) which took place at the beginning of July 1932. In that gathering, Zaki Ali and the other proponents informed the present Muslims about the association that they were about to found and asked them to provide the names and addresses of all Muslims in Austria that they knew. The celebration was also attended by the prominent Lebanese pan-Islamic activist Emir Shakib Arslan, who gave a speech emphasising the unity of Islam over ethnic differences.[27] After this event, the main proponents of the idea began preparing the necessary official documents and bylaws to establish the new association. In addition to Zaki Ali, two other proponents signed these documents: Mohammed Ali El Binni and Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels.

In a Quest for Leadership

In October 1932, all Muslims in Austria were invited to join the official foundational meeting of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* in Vienna. At the meeting, Austrian Muslims elected Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels to be the first president of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and thereby of the Muslim community in

Todorova discussed the importance of the Ottoman legacy in defining the place of the Balkans in modern European; see: Maria Nikolaeva Todorova, ed., *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Maria Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Marc David Baer's book argues for including the Ottoman Empire into European history; see Marc David Baer, *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars and Caliphs* (London: Basic Books, 2021). On the post-Ottoman period, see for instance: Fikret Karčić, *The Bosniaks and Challenges of Modernity: Late Ottoman and Hapsburg Times* (Contemporary Islamic Thought = Savremena Islamska Misao) (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1999); Robert J. Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle: The Muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1878–1914* (East European Monographs 78) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). See also: Emily Greble, *Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[25] Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, 'Dr. Zākī ʿAly: A Lifelong Service to Islam', *IRCICA Newsletter*, 1999, 23.

[26] Abdulqadir Al-Ahdal, 'al-jundiy al-majhūl [The Unknown Warrior]', http://www.al-rawdah.net/r.php?sub0=allbooks&sub1=a5_general3&p=1008, accessed 16 July 2021.

[27] Ibid. On Shakib Arslan's role in interwar Europe see especially: Mehdi Sajid, *Muslime Im Zwischenkriegseuropa Und Die Dekonstruktion Der Faszination Vom Westen: Eine Kritische Auseinandersetzung Mit Šakīb Arslāns Artike ln in Der Ägyptischen Zeitschrift al-Fatḥ (1926–1935)* (Bonner Islamstudien, Band 33) (Berlin: EBVerlag, 2015), 113–47.

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Austria.[28] While Zaki Ali remained the real driving force in the background, he was now appointed to be the general secretary of the association. The remaining board members of the association, which fluctuated, included people originating from Bosnia and Hercegovina, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Austria.

Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels' election as the first president of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* was not surprising. Von Ehrenfels was born in 1901 in Prague, then a vital city of the Austrian-Habsburg empire. His father, Christian von Ehrenfels (1859–1932), was a renowned philosopher, founder of Gestalt theory and a mentor of Sigmund Freud.[29] Growing up in an aristocratic and intellectual environment, Omar was exposed early on to various cultural and intellectual circles in Europe's major cities. His father's open attitude toward world cultures and Islam piqued Omar's interest in learning more about different cultures. At the age of twenty-two, he went on a trip to the Balkans and Turkey with his best friend and later brother-in-law, Wilhelm von Bomersdorf. During his journey he learned more about Islam, interacted with Muslims and also attended prayers in mosques. While in Turkey, he decided to convert to Islam; however, he later recounted: 'I could not enter Islam then, because there were no Muslims who could speak German'.[30] After he returned to Austria, he established contact with the Ahmadiyya Berlin Mosque, being the closest German-speaking mosque, and eventually announced his conversion there in 1927 at the age of twenty-six.[31]

Omar's sister, Imma von Bodmershof – born Imma von Ehrenfels – recapitulates in 1953 how she was 'utterly unable to understand my brother's love for the Turks and Islam'. She remembered that 'Austria still has not forgotten the Turkish wars, the siege of Vienna by the Turkish conqueror and many a family history dating back to those days'. This strong aversion and conflation of Islam with the Turkish wars were not confined to the general populace, but also 'educated circles still identify with the Turks and Islam the wild and cruel spirit of conquerors in general', alluding to how this sentiment was – and perhaps still is – deeply engrained in the Austrian collective memory.[32] This societal atmosphere in Austria should be kept in mind when considering the climate in which the *Islamsicher Kulturbund* aimed to create a Muslim space in Austrian society, thus explicitly bridging two elements which were regarded to be deeply incompatible, namely Islam and Austria.

Following his conversion, Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels became actively involved in European Muslim communities. He regularly published articles in the *Moslemische Revue* and in many other periodicals throughout Europe and was also elected as the honorary president of the *Orientbund* in Venna.[33] In 1932, he enrolled at the University of Vienna to study social and cultural anthropology, where he obtained a doctorate in 1937, thus building also an academic reputation and network.[34]

By 1932, he was already a prominent public figure in Austrian society and at the same time engendering trust and authority within Muslim communities throughout Europe, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, who were quick to celebrate European converts to Islam. This dual charisma, rooted in Austrian public life and society on the one side as well as in Islam and the Muslim community on the other side, made him the perfect candidate to represent the newly formed Muslim community seeking to root itself in Austrian society. His election aligned perfectly with the objective of the association to position itself as an association dedicated to Muslims in Austria, rather than just another

[28] OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien'; WStLA, 'M.Abt.119.A32, 6899/1932, Islamitischer Kulturbund'.

[29] On Christian von Ehrenfels, see: Reinhard Fabian, ed., *Christian von Ehrenfels: Leben und Werk* (Studien zur österreichischen Philosophie, Bd. 8) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986).

[30] 'The Anjuman's Anniversary', *The Light*, Jan. 1933. For this article an Arabic translation of the relevant article was used, which was published in the *al-fatḥ* magazine. See: 'al-bāron Omar Rolf al-nimsāwi aslama islaman qadyāniyyan', *al-fatḥ*, 24 Mar. 1933.

[31] Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, 'The "How" and "Why" of Conversion to Islam', *The Islamic Review*, June 1961.

[32] Imma von Bodmershof, 'My Brother (Umar Rolf von Ehrenfels)', *The Islamic Literature*, Aug. 1953, 52.

[33] WStLA, M.Abt.119.A32, 7048/1931, *Orientbund*.

[34] See in more detail about Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels: Gjulser Memedoska, *Umar Rolf Ehrenfels: Leben Und Wirkung Für Die Österreichische – Und Österreichisch Muslimische Gesellschaft [Umar Rolf Ehrenfels: Life and Impact for the Austrian Society and the Austrian Muslim Community]* (Vienna: University of Vienna, Unpublished Master's Dissertation, 2021).

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association mainly concerned with other countries and their affairs. It was therefore foreseeable that he would be elected as the first president of the Austrian Muslim community.[35]

Strategic Positioning of the Islamischer Kulturbund

The positioning of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* as an association for Muslims in Austria becomes apparent when closely reading its bylaws. The *Hauptaufgabe* (main task) of the association was designated as the 'support, gathering and organisation of all cultural affairs of Muslims of the West and especially those of Austria and the East'.[36] This goal expresses the association's aim to serve as the main body which unites Muslims in Austria and oversees their cultural affairs.

Since the association was meant to be an explicit Muslim faith community, ordinary membership was restricted only to 'Muslim men and women' who were recommended by two other members and were admitted by the founding committee, which illustrates the centrality of the religious dimension for the *Islamischer Kulturbund*.[37] Honorary membership, however, was open to other denominations as well. While the *Orientbund* continued to promote dialogue between religions and cultures and intellectual exchange about the Orient, the explicit Islamic faith-related activities were hived off and attended to by the *Islamischer Kulturbund*.

Their explicit positioning as an association for Muslims in Austria was further specified in another goal, stating that the association aimed at offering material and spiritual support in case of impoverishment, illness or death to '*in Österreich lebenden in- und ausländischen Muslims*' ('domestic and foreign Muslims living in Austria').[38] While the number of 'foreign' was naturally higher than that of 'domestic' Muslims – the latter alluding most likely to converts and the few Muslims who had been living there for a long time – it is still remarkable that the *Islamischer Kulturbund* aimed at gathering together and taking care of all of them, thus forming a multiethnic Muslim community bounded by faith on the one side and by their residence in Austria on the other.

In addition to the bylaws of the *I.K.*, its activities offer valuable insight into its performance as the main representative body of Austrian Muslims and self-positioning as a natural part of Austrian society. A core activity was the weekly meeting of the association, which took place on Thursdays in the Café Stadelmann and later in the Café Arkaden. There is something to be said about choosing cafés located in the historic centre of Vienna for the regular meetings of the Muslim faith community, thus participating in the famous Viennese coffee-house-culture (*Kaffeehauskultur*) of the interwar period and anchoring Muslimness at the heart of mainstream society and culture as well as inviting others to join their gatherings and get to know Islam and Muslims.

In these weekly coffee house meetings about fifteen women and men came together to listen to spiritual lectures and discuss topics related to the Islamic faith, history and culture.[39] Conversions to Islam were a regular part of these meetings and also of other activities. One of those who converted, or at least announced his conversion in the context of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, was the Orientalist Norbert Weisser, who from then on named himself Abdullah Norbert Weisser and became an influential Imam in Germany and later a member of the *Deutsch-Muslimische Gesellschaft* (German Muslim Society).[40] Another person, who probably became a Muslim before and only announced his conversion at one of the meetings of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, was the Orientalist Gyula Germanus, who later named himself Julius Abdelkarim Germanus. Although there were more conversions, the names of others are not mentioned in primary sources since they were probably not public

[35] For details on the young Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels see: Memedoska, *Umar Rolf Ehrenfels*, 9–29.
[36] OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien', 1932.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] See: Mohammed Ali at-Tahir, *dhikra al-amir Shakib Arslan* (Cairo: Ashoura Newspaper, 1947), 241; Adam Mestyan, '"I Have to Disguise Myself": Orientalism, Gyula Germanus, and Pilgrimage as Cultural Capital, 1935–1965', in *The Hajj and Europe in the Age of Empire*, ed. ʿUmar Riyāḍ (Leiden Studies in Islam and Society, Vol. 5) (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 219.

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figures.[41] It appears that the weekly meetings of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* were considered the official platform for Muslims to announce their conversion and official belonging to the Muslim community and to discuss the religious affairs of the community.

The example of the the *Id-ul-Fitr* celebrations of 1933 is a better illustration of how the association aimed to blend Islamic with Austrian cultural elements, thus indicating their rootedness in both Islam and Austrian society. The event was opened by the recitation of verses from the Quran, the holy book of Muslims. Zaki Ali then gave the opening speech in which he emphasised that the recent foundation of many Muslim associations throughout Europe provided the opportunity for non-Muslims to better understand the Islamic faith and culture, which would eventually lead to a rapprochement and better understanding between East and West. After him, Husam Wafa, another leading member of the association, delivered a speech on the fundamentals of the Islamic religion. This was followed by an artful recitation of poems of Muhammad Iqbal by the celebrated artist Elisabeth Günther, a renowned and popular reciter in Austrian society at the time. This openness and willingness of the Muslim community to celebrate their faith together with members of the wider society by inviting Muslim representatives of the community but also non-Muslims to speak and by inviting well-known Austrian artists to recite translations of poems by a Muslim philosopher and poet, while at the same time incorporating religious elements such as the recitation of the Quran into the programme, illustrates the performance of the dual rootedness, in society and faith. The celebrations were covered in magazines and newspapers in Austria, throughout Europe and Arab countries.[42]

The association's self-positioning as the main representative and uniting body of all Muslims in Austria was echoed by the wider Austrian society. The very first meeting of the association in October 1932, in which it was announced to the Muslim community that the *Islamischer Kulturbund* was to be founded, was perceived by Austrian newspapers as a gathering of the 'Moslems (*Mohammedaner*) von Österreich' (Muslims of Austria), as the Austrian newspaper *Neues Wiener Jounral* reported.[43] In addition, the yearly *Id-ul-fitr* celebrations were equally perceived from outside as organised by 'the association of the Islamic community in Vienna' and that they were attended by 'all Muslims living in Vienna, regardless of their ethnic background'.[44] This framing in Austrian newspapers highlights the paramount role that the *Islamischer Kulturbund* played in representing the Austrian Muslim community as a whole and also illustrates the initial success of the newly founded community to position itself within Austria, instead of being perceived as a foreign entity.

Building a Mosque, Rooting the Community

One of the central goals of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, which was actively pursued from its foundation, was to build a mosque for Muslims in Austria. In the bylaws of the association, it was stated that one main goal was to 'acquire the financial means to build a mosque in Vienna'. In an older version of the bylaws, it appears that this goal was an abbreviation of a longer formulation which stated that the *Islamischer Kulturbund* wants to give Muslims in Austria 'the opportunity to perform their prayers and religious celebrations in a dignified form, possibly in a mosque to be founded, as has been done for a long time in Berlin, London, Paris, Budapest and Warsaw'.[45] The English Ahmadiyya magazine *The Islamic Review* expressed in an article in November 1932 how dear this project was

[41] Ihsan Samy Hakky, 'rābitat al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya', *fatāt al-arab*, 14 May 1934.

[42] 'Festabend Des Islamischen Kulturbundes', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 25 Jan. 1934, ANNO/ÖNB; Zaki ʿAli, 'Islamischer Kulturbund Wien', *Moslemische Revue*, Apr. 1933; 'Proslava Bajrama u Beču [Bajram Celebration in Vienna]', *Islamski Svijet*, 23 Feb. 1934; Ihsan Samy Hakky, 'rābitat al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya', *fatāt al-arab*, 14 May 1934. Gharib Juma summarised the article in an online article he wrote about Zaki Ali; see: Gharib Juma, 'al-duktūr Zaki ʿAli: at- ṭabib al-dā'iya wa al-mujāhid bi-ghayr ṭabūl (3) [Dr. Zaki Ali: The Preaching Physician and the Warrior without Drums]', 2017, http://akhbar-alkhaleej.com/news/article/1057690, accessed 2 May 2024.

[43] 'Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 1 Dec. 1932, ANNO/ÖNB.

[44] 'Proslava Bajrama u Beču [Bajram Celebration in Vienna]', 8.

[45] OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien', 1932.

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to Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, stating that his 'life ambition is to build a mosque in Vienna, the capital of Austria'.[46]

The aspiration to build a mosque in Vienna should be considered on a legal-historical level since §3 of the Association Act (*Vereinsgesetz*) of 1867 prohibited the constitution of religious associations. This circumstance had led Muslims residing in Austria to found cultural associations that only hinted at religious aspirations in their association's objectives without explicitly stating them.[47] The *Islamischer Kulturbund*, however, clearly stated the goal of building a mosque. This should have caused discussions about approving the *Islamischer Kulutrbund* as an Islamic religious community (*Islamische Kultusgemeinde*), as envisaged by the Islam Act of 1912, since the building of a mosque would not have been possible under the Association Act of 1867.

This problem also had historical roots since Austria had witnessed two mosque-building attempts since 1909.[48] The first of these was initiated in 1909 by the mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, and was supported by Kaiser Franz Joseph as well as by Bosnian Muslims.[49] However, the project was first postponed with reference to the legal situation, which only allowed public worship, as would be the case with a mosque, to recognised religious societies (*anerkannte Religionsgesellschaften*).[50] Subsequently, the mosque-building debate urged the official recognition of Islam as a religious society (*Religionsgesellschaft*), as was eventually accomplished with the Islam Act (*Islamgesetz*) of 1912.[51] Nevertheless, due to the outbreak of the war, the mosque-building project was not realised.[52]

Even though the *Islamischer Kulturbund* did not seek legal recognition as the designated *Kultusgemeinde* (religious community) of the Muslims in Austria, their pursuit of mosque construction effectively established them as such. The question remains open as to why the Austrian authorities even allowed the *Islamischer Kulturbund* to be approved as an association according to the Association Act of 1867 and not as an Islamic religious community (*Islamische Kultusgemeinde*), since it obviously pursued goals that were reserved only for religious communities (*Kultusgemeinden*).

Referring to other Muslim communities in different European countries in its bylaws illustrates an approach to transnational learning amongst European Muslim communities, but to the same extent it showcases the desire to establish a distinct autonomous Austrian Muslim community with its own mosque. A purpose-built representative brick-and-mortar mosque would lie at the very heart of this newly formed community, as it would have established the Austrian Muslim community also as a physical manifestation. For many Muslim European associations at this time, having a mosque was therefore the most important step towards establishing a community.[53]

This is not to say that the attempt at building a mosque represents a declaration of intent from all Muslims in Austria to stay there for the long term and thus make it their home. Certainly for some Muslims this could have been the case, such as Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels and a few others who at the time this goal was formulated envisioned a future in Vienna for themselves and the Muslim community. However, even if the majority declined this invitation – as I will demonstrate they did – the mere presence of a mosque would have provided the essential lasting physical infrastructure to build a Muslim community in Austria at any time. The intention of building a mosque, a designated religious space, must therefore be read as an act of spiritual rooting and home-making by the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and its leadership.

[46] Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, 'Islam and the Present Generation in Europe', *The Islamic Review*, Nov. 1932.
[47] See for example: Dautović, 'Islamitisch Akademischer Verein "Zvijezda"'.
[48] See: 'Die Islamitischen Studenten Und Der Wiener Moscheebau', *Neue Freie Presse*, 20 Dec. 1908, 16, ANNO/ÖNB; 'Hadschi Luegers Unglückliche Liebe', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 20 Dec. 1908, 6, ANNO/ÖNB.
[49] Hadžić, *Der moslemische Sozialdienst die kommunikativen Leistungen des Trägers des religiösen und sozialkulturellen Lebens der Muslime in Österreich 1962–1979* (Wien: Safinah Verlag, 2013), 86.
[50] Richard Potz, 'Das Islamgesetz 1912 – eine österreichische Besonderheit', in: *SIAK-Journal – Zeitschrift für Polizeiwissenschaft und polizeiliche Praxis*, no. 1 (2013): 48.
[51] Susanne Heine, Rüdiger Lohlker, and Richard Potz, *Muslime in Österreich: Geschichte, Lebenswelt, Religion: Grundlagen für den Dialog* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia G.m.b.h., 2012), 55.
[52] See for a summary: Hadžić, *Der moslemische Sozialdienst*, 87.
[53] Motadel, 'The Making of Muslim Communities', 17–23.

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Figure 2. © C.Stadler/Bwag; CC-BY-SA-4.0; The 'Islamisches Zentrum Wien' (Vienna Islamic Centre) was opened in 1979. Zaki Ali mentioned in a letter that he returned to Vienna in the 1960s and handed over the money he had collected for the mosque building project in 1932 to the Egyptian ambassador to Austria at that time who was in charge of the mosque building committee of the Islamic Centre. See footnote 86.

As the next section will show, the mosque building project eventually failed, mainly due to lack of support by Muslims in Austria. This, however, does not diminish the efforts of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and its leadership to actively establish the community in Austria by pursuing the construction of a mosque (Figure 2).

Unsurmountable Challenges and the End of the New Community

Members without Commitment

Even though Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels considered the mosque building project to be his 'life's ambition', it was Zaki Ali who eventually undertook the work. Soon after the foundation of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and the election of von Ehrenfels as president, he left Austria for a months-long trip to India. While his travel brought some international publicity – as well as controversy – to the activities of the association, the bulk of the work to be done rested on those individuals who remained in Austria.[54]

Upon von Ehrenfels' return to Austria in May 1933 – and in response to the recent Nazi takeover in Germany – he decided to devote most of his time to anti-Nazi activism.[55] In subsequent years he would not appear in any official records of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*; however, he would still attend some of its events and stay in contact with the Muslim community. During this time, Mohammed Ali

[54] On the controversies related to his India trip, see: Umar Ryad, 'Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya, and European Converts to Islam in the Interwar Period', in *Muslims in Interwar Europe,* eds. Agai et al., 73–5.

[55] See: Omar T. Nasr and Tim Corbett, 'Diversifying Modern Austrian History: Exploring Parallels and Intersections between Jewish and Muslim Histories in Austria', in: *PaRDeS: Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien e.V.* 29 (2023): 137–48.

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El Binni was busy with the affairs of the *Orientbund*, leaving Zaki Ali as the effective single leader of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, and while other board members were fluctuating regularly, Zaki Ali was one of the very few who continuously worked for the association.

At the age of eighty-five, Zaki Ali recalled with great disappointment the efforts he undertook to raise money from the Muslim community in Austria for building the mosque. After setting up a donation fund and publicly calling for donations and sending messages to Austrian and international Muslims, asking them to donate, he only received a few dollars in total, mainly from Muslims in other countries, such as Finland or Palestine. With great disappointment, he could not make sense of '[t]he money that Muslims spend on luxury and extravagance; why don't they spend some of it in obedience to God?' This struck him especially in view of his observation that 'the Christians missionise the Muslims all over the world, like in Indonesia and Sudan, and they invest a lot of money in it'. Crying out in despair, he asked why 'the Muslims in turn do not invest money for the sake of their own religion?'[56]

The primary reason for the poor donations stems most likely from the fact that, during this period, the Austrian Muslim community did not fully embrace the ambitious objectives set forth by the association's leaders. While many of them actively engaged in regular activities, particularly during significant religious celebrations, most did not envision a long-term life in Austria. The majority of the Muslim students resided in Austria only for the duration of their studies and were primarily focused on their educational pursuits. If they had any spare time, it was often directed toward involvement in anti-colonial activities. Only a select few individuals, such as Zaki Ali, held a broader vision for the future of Islam in Europe and Austria and were willing to actively work towards its realisation. To be sure, the lack of commitment to building an Austrian Muslim community was one of the main reasons why the mosque-building project failed, and the association started to stagnate.

This does not imply that, at this point, Zaki Ali made a deliberate choice to remain in Vienna for the entirety of his life. Nevertheless, his activism exacted a heavy toll that eliminated the possibility of his return to Egypt, ultimately leading him to regard Europe as his de facto home. When the Egyptian government became aware of Zaki Ali's foundation of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, they demanded that he return to Egypt and threatened to terminate his funding if he refused. Zaki Ali made the choice not to return, and in response, the government ceased his financial support, leaving him without any means of financial assistance. During this period, Zaki Ali recollected, Shakib Arslan told him in a conversation: 'You sacrificed your position for the sake of this association, and you may find yourself in hardship with no one coming to your aid.'[57]

In the months and years ahead, Zaki Ali would endure a life of hardship, struggling to find any stable source of income. Ihsan Hikky, a friend of Zaki Ali and editor of the magazine *Fata al-Arab*, who visited Austria in 1934 and witnessed the difficult conditions in which Zaki Ali lived, was astonished that 'despite the harshness and roughness of life' that Zaki Ali experienced, 'he is still persistent with his seriousness and his activism'. Hikky was deeply impressed as he had 'not yet seen a person who endures what this young man endures for the sake of public service'. Even on the day of the feast, Hikky 'learned that he [Zaki Ali] had spent *Id ul-fitr* eating only dry bread, while on that day he welcomed the well-wishers of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and showed them hospitality and joy'.[58]

In view of Zaki Ali's unsustainable situation, he made the decision to leave Austria for Geneva temporarily, as he received a job offer from Shakib Arslan, who invited Zaki Ali to become his secretary for the organisation of the first European Muslim congress that was to take place in September 1935 in Geneva. Zaki Ali had already mentioned the congress in his speech at the *Id-ul-Fitr* celebration of 1933, where he announced that the first European-Islamic congress would soon take place in Geneva. He elaborated that this congress would be attended by the official representatives of about fourteen million European Muslims.[59]

[56] Al-Ahdal, 'al-jundiy al-majhūl [The Unknown Warrior]'.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ihsan Samy Hakky, 'Rābitat Al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya', *Fatat Al-Arab*, 14 May 1934.
[59] Zaki ʿAli, 'Islamischer Kulturbund Wien', *Moslemische Revue*, Apr. 1933.

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By the start of 1935 Zaki Ali had moved to Geneva to take care of the planning and organisation of the congress. After his departure, the *Islamischer Kulturbund* ceased to organise any gatherings and events, which underlines that, after all, the association for the most part depended on the pro-activism and leadership of Zaki Ali. In 1937, Austrian authorities started investigations into the *Islamischer Kulturbund* to find out if the association was still active. In the process, they interviewed some of the members of the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, who consensually considered the *Islamischer Kulturbund* as dissolved with the departure of Zaki Ali.[60]

Mehdi Gassem, who was officially a member of the *Auskunftsstelle* (information section) of the association, informed the Austrian officials that after the departure of Zaki Ali the activities continued for a short time under the leadership of Sayed Mahmudi but that he refused to become president of the association because he was overloaded with his studies. He also assured him that he would contact Zaki Ali on this behalf and ask him to formally dissolve the association or 'to request the suspension of the associations' activities until his return to Vienna'.[61] Zaki Ali then sent a letter to the Austrian authorities on 23 March 1937. In it, he expressed his disappointment that Sayed Mahmudi did not wish to continue the activities of the association and assured them that he would re-organise the association's work 'when I return to Vienna later'.[62] The investigations were subsequently stopped and the association officially continued in its legal existence, although they did not hold any activities.

By July 1937, Zaki Ali was still optimistic that he would be able to return to Vienna and pick up the work of the association. In his first book that he finalised while in Geneva during this time, he wrote that he was sure of 'a bright future for Islam in Europe', observing that 'almost all the principal capitals in Europe have their Muslim societies and clubs'.[63] Unfortunately, his vision was not shared by most of his interlocutors in Vienna, who did not continue the association's work. In addition, the plans of Zaki Ali to return to Austria were disrupted by the *Anschluss* in March 1938, which prevented his return to Austria and caused him to stay in neutral Switzerland indefinitely (Figure 3).[64]

Figure 3. © R. Eggimann, Genève; a portrait of Dr. Zaki Ali at age 37. See: Zaki Ali, *Tels sont les peuples blancs* (Genève: Aldin, 1973), preface.

[60] OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien.'
[61] Ibid.
[62] Zaki Ali's letter to the 'Polizeidirektion Wien', in: OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien.'
[63] Ali, *Islam in the World*.
[64] 'Schweizer Bundesarchiv, E4320B#1984/29#129*, C.10.51, Zaki, Ali, 5.2.1905, 1939–1943.'

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Muslims and the Rise of Fascism in Austria

The rise of Nazism in Austria was accompanied by an early surge in xenophobia towards foreigners, including Muslim students. An incident in the early 1930s serves as a stark example of this hostile environment. In 1932 in Graz, Jehia el-Sherbini, the chairman of the *Ägyptischer Studenten Verein Graz* (Egyptian Student Association of Graz), filed a complaint letter to the Egyptian embassy in Austria, reporting a 'national-socialist attack on Egyptian students' that occured in a restaurant in Graz. According to the report, over thirty national socialists taunted, ridiculed, and insulted four Egyptian students, leading to a violent altercation in which the Egyptians were physically assaulted 'with beer mugs and chairs'. Despite a security guard's presence, who was initially unresponsive to their pleas for help, and the restaurant's owner's apparent indifference, the students were surprised that, after the brawl ended, the Austrian police arrested only the Egyptians, allowing the Nazis to leave. The restaurant owner, the security guard, and the police all sided with the Nazis and 'disregarded the rights of foreigners'.[65] The chairman of the Egyptian student association, therefore, requested the Egyptian embassy to take action to prevent such an incident from reoccurring. This incident vividly illustrates the already tumultuous atmosphere in Austria during the early 1930s.

However, it's important to note that the full ascent of Nazism in Austria occurred only with the Anschluss in 1938. The 1930s in Austria were affected by another variation of fascism, known as Austro-fascism. In an unprecedented totalitarian act, the Christian Socialist chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß dissolved the Austrian parliament in 1933 and transformed the state into a repressive one-party dictatorship modelled after fascist Italy. The Austro-fascist ideology was characterised by a strong emphasis on Catholicism – in contrast to a Protestant orientation in Germany. This alignment with Catholicism played well with the general anti-German and particularly anti-Nazi narrative propagated by the Austro-fascist government. Austrians were considered superior Germans because they were *kulturdeutsch* (cultural Germans) and Catholics.[66]

This strong clerical orientation was featured prominently during the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Katholikentag* (General German Catholics Day) in 1933. This was a major, lavishly staged mass event, which coincided with the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the perceived victory of Christianity over the Ottomans and Islam after the siege of Vienna in 1683, an anniversary which was now increasingly emphasised.[67] At the event, Austria was portrayed as the bulwark against the Turks and the defender of Catholicism in Europe.[68] This rhetoric employed anti-semetic and

[65] Complaint by the Aegyptischer Studenten Verein Graz, in: OeStA, NPA, 'Karton 485, Liasse Österreich I/1.'

[66] Some key works on Austro-fascism are: Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer, eds., *Austrofaschismus: Politik – Ökonomie – Kultur; 1933–1938*, 7. Aufl, Politik und Zeitgeschichte 1 (Wien: LIT-Verl, 2014); Emmerich Tálos and Florian Wenninger, *Das Austrofaschistische Österreich: 1933–1938*, Politik Und Zeitgeschichte, Band 10 (Wien: Lit, 2017); Roland Jezussek, *Der 'Austrofaschismus' – ein Modell autoritärer Staatsform. Ideologie, Entstehung und Scheitern des österreichischen Ständestaats* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009); Stephan Neuhäuser, ed., *Wir Werden Ganze Arbeit Leisten: Der Austrofaschistische Staatsstreich 1934: Neue Kritische Texte* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand GmbH, 2004); Gerhard G. Senft, Anton Pelinka, and Helmut Reinalter, *Im Vorfeld Der Katastrophe: Die Wirtschaftspolitik Des Ständestaates; Österreich 1934–1938*, Vergleichende Gesellschaftsgeschichte Und Politische Ideengeschichte Der Neuzeit, Bd. 15 (Wien: Braumüller, 2002). The term *Austrofaschismus* is contested. See for an excellent discussion about the different terms on this period, their usage and criticism: Haus der Geschichte Österreich (HdGÖ), 'Die Diktatur Der Vielen Namen', https://www.hdgoe.at/diktatur_der_vielen_namen, accessed 19 May 2022.

[67] Austrian rhetoric towards Islam and the Ottomans followed a slightly different Orientalist approach which is sometimes termed *Grenzorientalismus* (Frontier Orientalism). See: Andre Gingrich, 'Anthropological Analyses of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in Europe', *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (Nov. 2005): 513–15; Andre Gingrich, 'Orientalismus', in *Habsburg neu denken*, eds. Johannes Feichtinger and Heidemarie Uhl (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 156–62; Charles Sabatos, *Frontier Orientalism and the Turkish Image in Central European Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020). See also: Edin Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[68] See on the prevalence of the remembrance of the Turks in Austrian society and politics: Johann Heiss and Johannes Feichtinger, eds., *Der Erinnerte Feind* (Kritik & Utopie 2) (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2013); Johannes Feichtinger and Johann Heiss, eds., *Geschichtspolitik Und 'Türkenbelagerung,'* Kritik & Utopie 1 (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2013). This self-portrayal was not unique to Austria; similar developments can be found in other Central and Eastern European countries.

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Islamophobic elements, consolidating them into the term 'Turk', which represented the external enemy instrumental in shaping a unified sense of Austrian togetherness for centuries.[69]

The general political and societal atmosphere in Austria was radicalised even more after the attempted Nazi coup of July 1934, which resulted in the assassination of the charismatic dictator Engelbert Dollfuß. Following this event, National Socialists, Social Democrats, Communists, and other political opponents were systematically persecuted, executed, and interned in so-called *Anhaltelager* (internment camps). Dollfuß was revered as a martyr who had fallen in the fight against Nazism – a narrative that is still entertained nowadays.[70] While Nazism gained increasing popularity in society in view of the social and economic crisis that the Nazis promised to solve, the Austrian authoritarian state took on a radical anti-Nazi stance. This created a unique Austrian societal and political atmosphere where Muslims sought to establish their presence. The context differed from Berlin, where Nazis were already in power.

Conversely, Austria became a hub for anti-Nazi activism, including the involvement of some Muslims in these activities. Upon his return to Austria in May 1933 and in response to the recent Nazi takeover in Germany, Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels wrote several articles for the *Prager Tagblatt*, in which he reflected on his visit to India. A liberal democratic newspaper edited by the Jewish journalist Max Brod, the *Prager Tagblatt* was regarded from 1933 onwards as one of the main anti-Nazi newspapers in Europe. It provided a platform for many Jewish and anti-Nazi intellectuals to publish regularly and managed to maintain its autonomy until the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

Von Ehrenfels also joined the *Österreichischer Kulturunbund* (Austrian Cultural Federation) and the *Kulturpolitischer Diskussionsklub* (Cultural-Political Discussion Club).[71] In 1935, he assumed the position of chairman of the latter association and, in light of restrictive policies of the authoritarian Austrian government, changed its name to *Wiener Kulturklub* (Vienna Culture Club).[72] Under his leadership, the *Wiener Kulturklub* took on an anti-fascist stance, which was primarily directed against the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism. Through educational and cultural events 'the pacifist, with the austromarxist camp associated'[73] *Wiener Kulturklub*, expressed its resistance to the Nazi threat. Von Ehrenfels was regularly invited to anti-fascist events to give speeches alongside other prominent anti-fascist activists. He co-organised and took part in a lecture series at the *Wiener Kulturklub* entitled, *Das Judenproblem von höherer Warte betrachtet* ('The *Judenproblem* Examined from a Higher Perspective'), which was widely acclaimed by anti-Nazi activists, such as the well-known Irene Harandt, editor of the anti-Nazi newspaper the *Gerechtigkeit*.[74] Ehrenfels also lectured on *Entscheidungsjahre der Menschheit* ('decisive years of humanity'), and other topics in which he underlined and deepened his critical position towards Nazism.[75] His scholarly activism earned him a

See for example: Mary C. Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher, eds., *Rampart Nations: Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism* (New Perspectives on Central and Eastern European Studies, Vol. 1) (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

[69] See on the intertwined relation between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Farid Hafez, 'From "Jewification" to "Islamization": Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Austrian Politics Then and Now', *ReOrient* 4, no. 2 (2019): 199–202; Simon Hadler, 'Europe's Other? The Turks and Shifting Borders of Memory', *European Review of History/ Revue Européenne d'histoire* 24, no. 4 (2017): 507–26; see also: Nasr and Corbett, 'Diversifying Modern Austrian History'.

[70] Peter Berger, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs im 20. Jahrhundert* (2. Aufl) (Vienna: Facultas Verl. WUV, 2008), 171–7.

[71] On the *Österreichischer Kulturbund*, see: Klaus Amann, *Der Anschluß österreichischer Schriftsteller an das Dritte Reich: institutionelle u. bewußtseinsgeschichtliche Aspekte*, Literatur in der Geschichte, Geschichte in der Literatur 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988), 139.

[72] 'Note to the Viennese Police Directory on 12 July 1935,' in: OeStA/AdR BKA BKA-I BPDion Wien VB, 'XV 1652, Wiener Kulturklub.'

[73] Uwe Baur, *Literatur in Österreich 1938–1945. Band 5: Literarisches System in Österreich 1933/1938–1945: Zensur und Förderung – Literarische Vereine – Anthologien* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2021), 261.

[74] See for example: 'Das Judenproblem Und Sein Ende,' *Gerechtigkeit*, 2 Apr. 1937, 4; 'Der Österreichische Mensch,' *Gerechtigkeit*, 7 May 1936, 12.

[75] See: 'Vorträge Und Veranstaltungen', *Der Wiener Tag*, 10 Feb. 1937, 8; Baur, *Literatur in Österreich 1938–1945. Band 5*, 262.

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European-wide reputation as a leading voice against anti-Semitism and the rise of Nazism, a reputation that would later backfire. When the *Anschluss* occurred in 1938, von Ehrenfels had to flee Austria for India when he discovered he was on the Nazis' black-list.[76]

On the other side, Muslims, especially those involved in the anti-colonial struggle, fell under suspicion of cooperating with the Nazis. During this time, Nazi propagandists were seeking allies amongst anti-colonial activists to destabilise the British and French empires.[77] In 1935, shortly after Zaki Ali had left Austria for Switzerland, to participate in the organisation of the European Muslim Congress in Geneva, secret investigations were initiated based on reports from Swiss intelligence, which were shared with Austrian officials.[78] Zaki Ali was accused of attempting to free Muslims from the rule of the British, French, and other colonial powers. For this purpose, he allegedly had established contacts with National Socialist groups in Germany, particularly with Alfred Rosenberg, who served as the director of the foreign policy department of the NSDAP. Some of the accusations appeared to be absurd, such as the claim that Zaki Ali had been 'involved in an arms-smuggling affair in Egypt and Tripolitania' as early as 1920, for Ali would have been only fifteen years old at that time.[79] The Austrian state police concluded in a final report that 'Dr. Zaki Ali did not give rise to any adverse perceptions during his stay in Vienna'. They further highlighted that 'Nothing could be found out about a connection of the aforementioned with the German Reich, in particular with Rosenberg'.[80] It is significant that they could not find any evidence that would substantiate the claims against him and the *Islamischer Kulturbund,* given the systematic persecution of National Socialists by the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg dictatorship. If Zaki Ali had indeed had contacts with Nazis, he would have come under intense scrutiny from Austrian investigators. Concerning the *Islamischer Kulturbund*, the investigators reached the conclusion that 'No adverse information has come to light about the other board members of the association either'.[81]

In the months before the *Anschluss* there was hardly any Muslim community life anymore in Austria. The hostile climate of the Astro-fascist regime, the rise of Nazism, the uncertainty surrounding an imminent *Anschluss* and the looming threat of war led to many Muslims leaving Austria or isolating themselves, focusing on their studies or work. There was no real interest anymore in pursuing any religious affairs in Austria.

On 13 March 1938, with the enactment of the *Gesetz über die Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich* (Law on the Reunification of Austria with the German Reich), the *Anschluss* was legally formalised. Austria ceased to exist as an independent entity and was now formally designated as the *Ostmark*. The *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany and the subsequent onset of the war eventually terminated any prior Muslim community life in Austria.

The *Islamischer Kulturbund* was dissolved by the Nazis in 1939.[82] Dautović assumes that while the Nazis did not state an official reason for the dissolving of the association, it was clear that the responsible *Stillhaltekommissar* could not have allowed an association which was headed by the anti-Nazi

[76] Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, 'Brief Memorandum on My Flight & Internment 1938 till 1968', in: 'Roya C. Bates (Kurt Bauchwitz) Papers (1890–2006), Ehrenfels, Baron Umar Rolf & Mireille Abeille von. Correspondence with Roy C. Bates (1939–1974)' (M.E. Grenander Collections, University At Albany).

[77] See the report of the Austrian embassy in Cairo on National Socialist activities in the Middle East: Nationalsozialistische Bewegungen in Ägypten, in: OeStA, NPA, 'Karton 486, Liasse Österreich 2/21'.

[78] OeStA, NPA, 'Karton 343, Liasse Österreich 19/55', 1935.

[79] The descriptions in the intelligence reports bring to mind another figure, namely Dr. Zeki Kiram (1886–1946), who was a former Syrian officer in the Ottoman army and became a publicist and armaments agent in Berlin. Kiram was brought to Berlin during the First World War (in 1917) to receive medical treatment after a war injury and continued to stay in Berlin. He was later evidently in contact with Alfred Rosenberg and is known for trading German arms to Arab countries. It is possible that Zaki Ali was mistaken for Zeki Kiram, but this remains a matter of speculation. On Zeki Kiram, see: Umar Ryad, 'From an Officer in the Ottoman Army to a Muslim Publicist and Armament Agent in Berlin: Zekî Hishmat Kirâm (1886–1946)', *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 63 (2006): 235–68.

[80] OeStA, NPA, 'Karton 343, Liasse Österreich 19/55'.

[81] OeStA, VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien'.

[82] Dissolution notice from 30 Nov. 1939, in: OeStA VB, 'XIV 1144, Islamischer Kulturbund in Wien'.

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activist Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels to exist any longer, as he was committed to 'ensure that all associations, organisations and federations are oriented and led in a National-Socialist manner'.[83] Especially with the outbreak of the war, many of the Arab members of the *Islamsicher Kulturbund* from countries colonised by the British became citizens of enemy states and were 'interned, expelled or fled Austria […] only those nationally-minded Egyptians whose activities were useful to the Nazi regime remained free', as Chahrour concludes.[84] The dissolution of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and the dispersal of its members marked the end of organised Muslim community life in Austria during this period.

Conclusions

Although the *Islamischer Kulturbund*'s initial attempt to establish a Muslim faith community in 1932 faced failure, its leading members remained undeterred. After the Second World War, a new wave of primarily Yugoslavian and Turkish Muslims arrived in Austria, determined to lay the foundation for a new Muslim community. Dr. Smail Balic, a Bosnian historian who had come to Vienna as a student in the 1940s, emerged as a driving force in the postwar period. In 1962, he founded the *Moslemischer Sozialdienst* (MSD), which would later evolve into the officially recognised Austrian Muslim Council (IGGÖ), established in 1979. The three leading figures of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* each played a role in the reconstruction of the Muslim community in their respective capacities. Mohammed Ali El Binni, who continued living in Vienna and became a successful businessman after the war, made substantial and regular donations to the MSD, as noted by Smail Balic in his book, *Die Muslime im Donauraum* (The Muslims in the Danube Territory). Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, who had returned from India after the war, contributed intellectually by penning articles for the newly established magazine *Der Gerade Weg*, which was edited by Smail Balic.[85]

Zaki Ali, who continued residing in Geneva after the war, focusing mainly on writing articles and books, came in contact with some Muslims who arrived in Austria after the war. However, due to his quickly deteriorating health, which increasingly forced him into isolation, he was not able to get intensively involved. In the late 1960s, he learned of a group of Muslim ambassadors in Austria who were considering the construction of a mosque in Vienna. He made a final return to Vienna, handing over the donations he had diligently collected back in 1932 for the mosque-building project of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* to the Egyptian ambassador, who was overseeing the mosque-building committee. This mosque later became the Vienna Islamic Centre, opened in 1979. Notably, it stands as Vienna's first and sole mosque to feature a minaret, establishing a direct historical link to the interwar period and Zaki Ali's unwavering dedication.[86]

This article has explored the early attempt to establish a Muslim community in Austria, unravelling its formation and eventual failure. Based on unprecedently used and understudied primary material, the article has examined the leadership of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* and how they strategically aimed to integrate the nascent Muslim community into Austrian society. The association's careful selection of leaders, their deliberate self-positioning through defined goals and activities, and their ambitious

[83] 'Gesetzblatt Für Das Land Österreich, Nr. 136/1938. ALEX/ÖNB'; Dautović, '"Islamische Gemeinde Zu Wien" (1942–1945)'. See also Rijad Dautović's latest article on a Muslim association created during the Second World War in Vienna: Rijad Dautović, 'Islamische Gemeinde Zu Wien (Est. 1942): Muslims in Vienna between Collaboration and Protection of Jews during the Second World War', *Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 2 (26 Dec. 2023): 111–57.

[84] Chahrour, 'The "Mecca of Medicine"', 502.

[85] Smail Balić, *Die Muslims Im Doanuraum: Österreich Und Der Islam* (Vienna: Moslemischer Sozialdienst, 1971), 98. About the amount that El Binni was donating, see: '*Der Gerade Weg*', 1970, 4. On the Moslemischer Sozialdienst in general see: Hadžić, *Der moslemische Sozialdienst*; Oliver Pintz, *Vom Moslemischen Sozialdienst Zur Islamischen Glaubensgemeinschaft (IGGiÖ). Ein Beitrag Zur Genese Des Institutionalisierten Islam in Österreich*. Dissertation, University of Vienna, 2006.

[86] The details of this can be found in letters of Zaki Ali that were printed in: 'Abd al-Latif Jawhari, *Min a'lām al-du'at fi Urubba: al-'allāmah al-duktur Zaki 'Ali: dā'iyan najiban wa-'āliman ṭabīban wa-kātiban adīban [The Scholar, Dr. Zaki Ali: A Noble Preacher, a Knowledgable Doctor, and an Eloquent Writer]* (Jiddah: 'Alam al-Ma'rifah, 1998), 143.

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mosque construction project were all essential elements in their concerted efforts to make Austria a home for Muslims.

Moreover, the *Islamischer Kulturbund* serves as a pioneering milestone in the institutionalisation of Islam in Austria. Although they didn't invoke their right of legal recognition as the official representative body of Muslims in Austria under the Islam Act of 1912, the association's objectives and activities, particularly its pursuit of constructing a mosque, effectively placed them in that position. This positioning earned recognition from the Muslim community and the broader Austrian society.

The article also underscores that, while the association's goals were ambitiously pursued by a few dedicated individuals, it ultimately lacked the support of the majority of members. Most of them did not envision Austria as a long-term destination but instead a temporary stop on their educational or professional journeys. The work of the association rested on a few key figures, with Zaki Ali being the most steadfast force and prominent leader, until he as well had to leave Austria. This limited commitment from its members was a primary factor contributing to the association's ultimate failure in achieving its objectives.

A closely related factor was the increasingly radicalised political and societal climate in Austria. The rise of fascism, particularly Austro-fascism, created a hostile environment that prompted many members to leave or isolate themselves. The emergence of Nazism had multiple detrimental effects on the association, leading to the escape or non-return of key leaders and the termination of any prior Muslim community life. Nazism, therefore, was not only a caesura in Austrian and European history in general, but also in the history of Islam in Austria.

The experience of Muslims in interwar Vienna serves as a sobering reminder of the resilience and adaptability required of such cultural and religious community-building endeavours in challenging times. It highlights the importance of active community involvement and long-term commitment to sustaining such associations, especially in the face of economic crises and political turmoil. The *Islamischer Kulturbund*'s remarkable objectives and early achievements are a testament to the potential of such initiatives, while its ultimate dissolution underscores the formidable obstacles that can be encountered when striving to build and maintain a vibrant Muslim community.

The story of the *Islamischer Kulturbund* provides valuable insights for understanding the internal dynamics of community-building and the impact of external forces on such initiatives. While the *Islamischer Kulturbund* did not achieve its lofty goals, its legacy endures as a chapter in the complex and evolving history of Muslims in Austria, offering lessons for those who seek to navigate similar challenges in the future.

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