

Nisreen, you are the new coordinator of the »Werner Otto«-network. In the past, you received a »Werner Otto«-scholarship yourself - could you briefly describe how you pursued your career since then? What are your main research/academic interests right now?

I received the Werner Otto scholarship in 2001 during my Master Study for Natural resources and environmental management in Haifa University. The scholarship was both moral and financial important and significant support for me. Since then I have been engaged in civil society organizations in several areas as Gender, Environment and Human Rights. I lead some important projects as Women Projects in Unrecognized Villages, Palestinian Israeli Network for Peace and more. In 2005 I coordinate the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel and took part in its delegation to the UN in July 2005.

Over the years I took part in several international programs while my main aim was promoting environmental approach among the Palestinian Society in Israel. Environmental issues among Palestinians are the last in priorities. Lots of my activities aim to affect this and change it. As Blogger and Independent Lecturer I try mobilize several influential groups and affect their views regard environment and nature.

In 2009 I returned to the academia this time choosing Anthropology in order to understand describe and analyze the complexity of relationships between the Palestinians as Indigenous minority and the environment in Israel. My main interest is Ecological Practices among Palestinians while my research focuses on Local Gardens and Urban Ecology in Nazareth.

Looking back, in what way would you say did the WO-scholarship help/support you?

Students always have needs that can be answered by money and any amount of money will make it easier for them and can help them to find more time to do what they need to do to go further with their study and career.

For me, at that time, the scholarship was a major help, it helped me to renew my computer, to fix my car that make it possible to manage the combination between study and part time jobs, and it helped me to pay the tuition fees as my family couldn't keep supporting me for my graduate study as they were supporting my young brother for his bachelor.

As young woman studying at a nearby university, I kept living at my family house in Nazareth. In one hand it gave me significant daily support, in the other hand it save from me a house rent and other daily fees. Still I was looking for my autonomy and for that it was critical to be financially independent.

In general I can't say the scholarship helped me to fix the car or renew the computer, rather it helped me to go forward meeting my dreams and gaining my autonomy and independency.

The drop-out rates of Israeli Arab girls/women are high and the number of Israeli Arab women at institutions of higher education is low. Even at Haifa University, a high amount of female Arab students give up their studies already in their first year of study. What would you say, from personal experience, are the main reasons for that, at Haifa University or in general? What needs to be done in order to make a change here?

As a teacher assistant at the department of sociology and anthropology in Haifa University I got the chance and the opportunity to interact and engage with young students particularly Arab young women. From my short experience in the last two years, I got to better understand and reflect on my very own experience when I first joined university. Arab students in their first year at the university are challenged with new language, new culture and new system. These challenges impact their social integration in the new academic life including student life and community. This “cultural shock” turn to be a significant obstacle and disadvantage in their mobility within the academic system and the academic community in general. Add to that, in general Arab student need to work double or even more to cover the gap between them and other students due to the backwardness of the educational system they graduate from.

The Arab students live the poverty of their families and their society. In general Arab students hardly can find financial support that help them finish their study. Lots of them are dependent financially on their families that support them during their first years. The majority of them need to work and save money for to finance their study. However as young non professional workers, Arab students find it challenging to find work that can suit them, as the majority of this kind of works request military service as base condition.

Transportation is a major obstacle especially for Arab young women. Most of the Palestinian living area lacks available public transportation. Few of the Arab students have a place in the student’s dorms, others share renting apartments nearby the university, however, the majority need to travel daily all the way to the university and back home. Some privileged can make it by private cars usually students in their graduate studies, but the majority are non privileged and have no choice but to take public transportations which is usually not easily available or accessible in Arab villages and towns.

Future work opportunities have a big rule on the motivation of Arab students. An internal Joke say that “Doesn’t matter what you study you will end by as a teacher”. Unfortunately this joke reflects the reality of Arab students. As any student in the world Arab students choose their study looking for their future opportunities and future career. Few of them will reach their passions, while the majority will be trapped by limited future opportunities which limit them to engage the way they wish to.

Female Arab citizens in Israel face discrimination based on both their sex and their nationality. They face discrimination in all aspects of life, including education, employment, political participation or health. What would you say, how high is the awareness factor for this sort of discrimination within the Israeli population?

Unfortunately the awareness regard the multi layers discriminations face the Arab women both as female in patriarchal society and as member of discriminated minority In Israel is very little. In general, the Israeli society ignores this fact, and if at all it gains some attention it will take deep understanding and will end up blaming women and the Arab society for it.

Patriarchy and Racism work together and feed into each other. As there is more patriarchy, there is more racism, more stereotypes and prejudices and vice versa. Arab females work hard to mobilize themselves in environment full of prejudice and patriarchy, and they can hardly make it. Lots of them see the obstacles at the beginning of the road and decide not step out for it. Those who do face the challenges are unique and there is need for support to encourage more and more of them to go forward and reach their aims.

Are there developments – within the state of Israel, the population or maybe the University – that raise your hope that all citizens will be treated equally in the state of Israel one day?

We should never lose hope. During the last two summers a voice of social protest heard on the Israeli society. Till now this protest exclusively focuses on the economical situation inside the Israeli-Jewish society and didn't give any attention neither to the social economical situation for the Palestinian minority within Israel nor to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and it's affect on the economical situation.

In my opinion, The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a huge obstacle in front of any change in the attitude of Israeli-Jewish to the Palestinian citizens. Unfortunately for now I don't see any possible solution on the ground. To solve a conflict all parties have to want and desire a solution. Unfortunately this is not the situation in Israel and the Israeli summer social protest do not deal with this or even give any clue on it. Even though I hope that the coming election will bring a new leadership with inclusive vision that can lead all of us to better place.

What was your main motivation to take the challenge and coordinate the WO-network? What are your goals, what would you like to achieve within the framework of the network together with the (current and past) WO-scholars?

My own personal motivation to take this challenging role on me comes from my own experience. I can't forget the excitement I got when I first know about this unique talented skilled group of women. The first thought I had when I first hold the list of scholars was that I'm holding a treasure and should not ever leave it even for a second.

The main experience for graduate student is loneliness, and it enhance when it come to Palestinian women. Due to historical circumstances the majority of the graduate women in the current generation are the first in their families and communities who go further with academic career. This means that while these women lack role models, they are themselves a role model for others.

Being the first generation going further with academic career mean that they lack as well the social network that support mobility. Networking, Sharing Information, Supporting each other, raising awareness regards the unique challenges we face as Palestinian academic women, should support and increase advancement and mobility for each of us.

#### Achievements:

For the coming year I would like to lay the base for the Network and see it working and function in sustainable way that have the adjustment to keep working for the coming years. I would like to increase the visibility of academic Palestinian women in the communities and at the local media. To highlight researches done by Palestinian women. To establish working groups according to needs. And to work within the community to encourage and empower other young women to go further and meet their academic goals they desire for.