

# Foundation Friends of Nazareth

Tilburg - The Netherlands

Address Secretariat:  
P.O. Box 2256 - 5001 CG Tilburg – The Netherlands  
Email: [friends.nazareth.tilburg@planet.nl](mailto:friends.nazareth.tilburg@planet.nl)



## Students on their inspirations and their two-fold emancipation

During the working visit in Israel from 21 to 31 October 2009 a number of students received the note (see frame) with the question to write something on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee of the Foundation Friends of Nazareth.

This resulted in a variety of very special contributions. Shorook, Lana, Marlen, Safaa, Yoa'd, Rozan, Hana, Amna, Fatma, Amal, Lobna, Mona and Jeanne sent us their reactions. Their texts show how these women are inspired by a role model: a grandmother, a queen, a father and a female author. Furthermore they hope that they themselves will set an example that will motivate the next generation. Sometimes a poem, a work of art or a photograph is the source of energy to make them carry on. It also becomes clear that the women are in different stages of their studies or lives. For example, someone, who has just started her studies, is struggling to cope with the language problems she is having as a Palestinian at an Israeli university – a phase nearly all the older students went through. Some woman looks back on the difficult choices she had to make over the years, an other hopes to help build a society in which women will have a more equal position in society. The reader will undoubtedly be impressed by the search of each woman for her own identity: as a woman and as a Palestinian. And also by their commitment, perseverance and courage.



### Foundation Friends of Nazareth

Secretariat: P.O. Box 2256 - 5001 CG Tilburg - The Netherlands  
E-mail address: [friends.nazareth.tilburg@planet.nl](mailto:friends.nazareth.tilburg@planet.nl)

We are very pleased to ask your contribution for our Contactbrief in case of our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010.

In this special jubilee edition we will give attention to three items: you as one of our students, our donors and the working visits we made.

We need your contribution and ask you, if possible, to sent us two things.

1. A representative work of art, a picture (can be made by yourself) or a quote.  
An imagination that helps you in your development to be the woman you want to be. What shows what is important for you inspires you and can represent your incentive motive.
2. Your contribution in words (450, maximum 500 words )to three possible items:
  - Your **double emancipation** as woman: becoming an equal interlocutor, and woman in your society.
  - Is **solidarity** alive for you, in what way is it playing a part in your life?
  - What is the most important issue you are dealing with, what is your contribution, **your moving spring** ?

It is up to you to choose one item or to write about the three of them. Try to make the connection to your representation.

We like to receive your written contribution and the 'representation' by email, before 20<sup>th</sup> of December. (If you can sent the representation by mail, this is okay.)

In case of a picture, we like the formal document (jpg) big enough to be used by our publisher. If you make a picture of a person or a work of art, than you need permission to publish. This agreement we like to receive on paper.

From the received contributions we will choose the ones who fits best in the jubilee edition of June 2010.

If we get more than can be published, we will use them in het Contactbrief of November 2010.

Good luck and thank you very much in advance!

The board of the Foundation Friends of Nazareth:

Our honorary president, Siny Bootsma and Els Schots, Willem, Collin, Hanneke, Ad en Els Canoy.

All in remembrance to mr. Kok, who was with Siny Bootsma the Founder of The Foundation Friends of Nazareth.



**Shorook (1986)** was born in Nazareth and is a fifth-year medical student at the Technion in Haifa. She worked as a volunteer at the emergency department of a Nazareth hospital.

## We are setting an example to the younger girls

We, as Palestinian girls in Israel, don't study only for ourselves; we study to prove a point. We study to prove to ourselves, our parents, our community, and to the whole generation of girls who are younger than us, that we are capable to achieve things.

As we become more educated, we literally arm ourselves in order to survive and to prove that we matter, that we can make a difference, and above all this: that we can raise educated, powerful, and caring children ... that is – the future.

We are setting an example to the younger girls, who see us and dream to be like one of us, they see us as successful ladies who broke the chains of our Arab community as well as the Israeli community.

*“As you educate a woman, you educate the family. If you educate the girls, you educate the future”* A quote by Queen Rania AL-Abdalla can't be more inspirational.



**Lana (1981)** took a Masters degree in Movement Studies for Actors with financial assistance from the Foundation from 2005 to 2007. She worked as a volunteer in theatre workshops with youngsters in Haifa en Bez at the time of the Lebanon War. She is a founder of the Sana Foundation.

## Women building bridges

Lana Zreik: This photo was taken by Rimon Hadad almost three years ago, while I was on stage performing the monodrama “The Human Voice” (written by Jean Cocteau), which won a prize for the best monodrama in the Monodrama Festival 2007, Acre.

I find this photo very powerful as it shows the multi dimensions a woman has and the different characters she plays in life. Letting out the human voice that lies within, the play itself talks about love and sacrifice, and I believe these are the essence of each right-minded woman in the world who has the ambition to give her surroundings a better future out of love and sacrifice.



I see her as absorbing her energy from the light and the nature around her, fulfilling her diverse roles, as a human being, a volunteer, a student, a careerist, a wife and a mother, while, according to the role she chooses to fulfil, she invests all of that energy in the fields related, i.e. humanity, society, research, career, family, children and so on... until she picks the ripe fruits of each step in her life.

Being a woman in the Palestinian

society in Israel is not always easy; in fact it is quite a task. Living in a tensed and unstable spot on the globe adds more burdens in the path of daily life, not to mention the threatening atmosphere, the insecurity, and the insufficient economical conditions she lives under. Moreover, work opportunities are tight and women have more difficulty than men to find jobs, though, the fact, that the number of educated Palestinian women in Israel is obviously increasing from year to year, pours a beam of light. However, this is not to suggest that the Palestinian woman is enjoying the freedom of self-determination, as in many sectors, in the eyes of the male-dominated and conservative society, the woman is still far away from being valued as an equal to the man at all levels of life.

Personally, I believe in the strength of a woman and her important role in society. Following that belief, at a general interest level, I am taking part in creating the new Sana Foundation that will very soon be a response to Palestinian students in Israel, who wish to pursue a higher education and obtain a degree with our scholarship support and in cooperation with our mentor: the Foundation Friends of Nazareth. On a personal level, I am currently pursuing my advanced research aspiring for a PhD degree and to be part of the academic scene. Being a woman who carries on both paths could inspire and motivate other women to contribute to their society and develop their own knowledge and encourage them to believe in their capabilities and give them hope that their dreams can come true.

Finally, I see the urge and need to fill plenty of spaces and bridges between the gaps from which we suffer; to empower the Palestinian woman with mental and financial supports, to enrich her knowledge and awareness, and to pave a less bumped road for self-determination. Thus, I encourage and invite all who wish or are capable to contribute and help improving the Palestinian minority in Israel, especially the women, in any way possible, to do so actually: they will be more than welcomed and most appreciated.



**Marlen (1989)** was born in Nahariya and is a student of ergo therapy at Tel Aviv University. She worked as a volunteer at the Girls' Center in Makker Village.

*Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, "She doesn't have what it takes." They will say, "Women don't have what it takes." Clare Boothe Luce.*

## **Problem with the language: a challenge in studying**

This is a quote that I really like. It shows that a woman needs to succeed more than a man to prove to her community that their convictions are wrong. Woman is equal to a man, in fact she is even better. I need to work hard, I need to do whatever it takes to succeed, and before proving my strength and responsibility to others, prove it to myself at the first place. Make my parents proud of me, that they raised a strong girl that they can depend on .

What is the most important issue I am dealing with right now?

It might sound strange but the most important issue I am dealing with right now is the most difficult one I have ever faced so far.

It is this bad feeling I first felt when I got into the first class in the university. I was sitting in the class and hearing the teacher speaking and teaching us in Hebrew. I was not believing my ears, although I knew that Hebrew is the language spoken. It hurts, that we do not have a university of our own. It hurts that we do not get to understand everything that is being taught because Hebrew is not our first language. It hurts if we have a question and do not understand something, we feel embarrassed to raise our hand and ask, because we might pronounce some words incorrectly.

I got out of the class feeling sad. I thought that I was the only one who felt like that. Later on, I spoke to a couple of Arab girls in my class and they told me that felt this way too.

Nothing we can do, we said to ourselves. We have to get used to this situation, we may have a lot of difficulty with it, but this is what it is.

Three weeks later, we were sitting in a class attending a course. In this course we sat as a big group and we talked about everything we wanted.

Jewish girls complained that the Arab girls do not talk and participate in the conversations. We all explained that it is very hard for us since the language is not our mother tongue , we are not used to speak the language, and although we really want to take part in the conversation we can't keep up with the talking. At the end of the class a Jewish girl started to cry. We did not know why. Class was over and we did not get to talk and ask her why. Next week one of the Arab girls asked her what was wrong? The Jewish girl said that she cannot stand that there are Arabs in her group and that she's a minority in this specific group ( although she's not a minority in the faculty). We were all surprised, each of us was looking at the other. We started crying, I cried as well, It hurts to hear that the one

who took your land is making you feel that you are a guest in it. I honestly got mad and told her that her feelings are not important. One of her friends told me to let her speak. I answered that she cried and yelled because we were talking about difficulties we face, now are you asking me to give her an opportunity to talk and she could not stand us talking!! While a couple of Arab girls were crying because they got excited, this Jewish girl was laughing and laughing... This situation I will never be able to forget, till now I do not really know what do , and how to react...I am thinking of this over and over again every day and every night.



**Safaa Kabha (1985)** was born in Um-el-Kataf in the North of Israel and has been a medical student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem since 2004. She does volunteer work as an educational advisor to teenagers.

## The role of the women is to build

This year is my sixth and final year of my current studies. It was a very enjoyable and yet competitive hard journey. Every day is a new day with its experiences, confrontations and challenges. For all of that and more I decided six years ago to be a strong Arab, or rather a strong Arab woman. I want to write to you about two important characters that influenced me a lot and shaped a lot of my thoughts and believes.

The first one:

During my youth I was influenced a lot by a Syrian Arab female writer named "Gada Elsmán", who currently lives in France because she can't be free in her own country neither as a woman nor as a citizen. I want to quote from her poem "woman of the sea " "قصيدة امرأة البحر".

"woman of the sea " : \*my own translation in English, I hope the idea of the poem is clear"

<p>"woman of the sea "</p> <p>He draw to me in Chalk a cycle on the wall</p> <p>And told me to stand inside it</p> <p>So I ran away</p> <p>To the streets of the sea</p> <p>***</p> <p>Angry, he followed me</p> <p>Angry, he chirped in my face and hit me</p> <p>And said "the case is serious"</p> <p>The broadcasting is live</p> <p>And I had to return with him to the studio</p> <p>To stand in the middle of the Chalk cycle,</p>	<p>"قصيدة امرأة البحر "</p> <p>رسم لي بالطباشير دائرة على الجدار</p> <p>وقال لي : قفي داخلها ...</p> <p>فانطلقت هاربة</p> <p>إلى شوارع البحر.</p> <p>* * *</p> <p>غاضباً لحق بي</p> <p>غاضباً زقزق في وجهي ، وقرعني</p> <p>وقال إن القضية جادة</p> <p>وان "البث مباشر"</p>
---	--

Light spot ***	ويجب أن أعود معه إلى (الاستديو) لأقف وسط دائرة الطباشير
Poor and wet	وتحت دائرة الضوء
Like a winter beggar	* * *
I have tried to tell him	مسكينة ومبتلة
That I am also serious!	كمتسول شتائي
But (never, never)	حاولت أن أقول له
will I not let him imprison me	إنني انا أيضاً جادة ! ..
Inside the Chalk cycle	ولكنني (أبدأ أبدأ)
On some wall, some land, some theater	لن أتركه يسجنني
I will not let him imprison me	داخل دائرة مرسومة بالطباشير
Not because of his name, and not in the name of love, and	على جدار ما .. أرض ما .. مسرح ما ..
not the name of soiree	لن أتركه يسجنني ،
Not the name of anybody	لا باسمه ، ولا باسم الحب ، ولا باسم الشهرة ،
***	ولا باسم أحد .
Oh, take my heart and bite it like an apple	* * *
But do not imprison me inside a closed cycle	آه خذ قلبي ، واقضمه كتفاحة
***	ولكن لا تسجنني داخل دائرة مغلقة ! ...
This is the first time I notice in horror	* * *
That the first letter of your name	ها أنا ألحظ للمرة الاولى ، ويرعب
Is a part of the cycle	ان الحرف الأول من اسمك
So do not continue drawing it around me	هو جزء من دائرة
***	فلا تتابع رسمها حولي !
To the coast of the sea I ran away from you	* * *
And I stand alone	
And in the chalk of the freedom	إلى شاطئ البحر أهرب منك
I draw an unclosed cycle	وأقف وحيدة
Open from the sides toward the sea and the skyline	وبطبشورة الحرية
And I jump in	ارسم دائرة غير مغلقة ،
And then run to the sea	مفتوحة من طرفيها باتجاه البحر والافق
The Sea...sea...sea...	وأقفز داخلها ،
	وأركض منها إلى البحر ..
	البحر .. البحر ... البحر

This poem tells the personal story of the writer and in some way the story of a lot of Arab women in the Arab world, including Arab citizens in Israel.

She was raised in the conservative Damascus society, but her father was a liberal and educated man, who trusted and supported his daughter. However she had a lot of confrontations with this closed, male dominant society, not only from the males in the society but also from the females.

In her writing she emphasizes all the time that the man is not the one to put guilt on, because despite his part in the oppression of the woman, he is actually a victim just like the woman, they are both victims of the Arab 'fake' and 'patronizing' traditions. She also puts partial responsibility on the political oppression in the whole Arab world, because an unfree citizen, whether man or woman, will for his/her part continue the oppression, because he/she does not know any other way.

Gada Elsman writes mainly about the oppression against the Arab women in Arab society, she deals



with its reasons, background and solutions, from her point of view.

Before I was introduced to her work I didn't really think about this subject profoundly, I always felt unfairness against the women in general, but because in my home it didn't affect me that much ( because my parents are liberal in their souls even if they didn't really use the formal word). But outside the house I did feel it: when dealing with my friends at school, or even with a note from a teacher or [-] with the various criticisms of relatives. And one way or another, I took up her opinions. Especially as an Arab woman and Israeli citizen, who on a daily basis deals with prejudice, and even in some cases, with racism,.

The second one:

My grandmother - her name is Fatmah [also my mother's name]- she was a really tough woman, who during all her life faced challenges and got over them, she really was and will be my role model. She built her own house in the village in the late thirties of the previous century, bought her own land, and farmed it on her own. My grandfather was a salesman, who traveled all the time; therefore she took responsibility for all of her children and the house.

She told me a lot about the night the Israeli army invaded the village when they took over the historical Palestine in 1948. She was alone at the house with her two children , my uncle Kamel and my aunt Kamelah, closed the doors and windows with big rocks and spent the night praying to god to save her children. Her prayers were answered.

In the morning when things settled down a little bit, she returned to her field and olive trees.

I spent much of my childhood in my grandmother's house, because my mother was a working mother and I had a good relationship with my grandmother all the time. She told me stories, poems and proverbs, which from her point of view exemplified the role of Arab women in society.

She always told me a saying that her mother had told her all the time: الزلمى جنا والمرأة بنا

In English: the role of the man is to work and bring in money and economic stability, while the role of the woman is to build. I have to agree with such profound understanding of the rights and roles of women, because in my opinion women and men are partners in life, they are different in many aspects, yet they share so many things, such as the responsibility of partnership and community. It is important to progress and develop these differences and similarities, every one must cooperate and respect each other despite their gender.

I believe that when I am graduated I will have the chance to affect my community more profoundly and significantly, and by that I mean the Arab community in Israel. I will have the chance to influence the younger and older generation and to convince them that we should start and respect each other's rights, including women rights, soon; to convince them that women could be an efficient part of the society. To achieve that goal we should start to see a woman as equal rather than inferior to man and support her in her development.



**Jeanne Aouda (1989)** was born in Utrecht and grew up in Sakhnin. She is a third-year student of Law and International Relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She does volunteer work at the Community Center in East-Jerusalem, which gives legal aid to people.

With this I am sending two pictures for the 25 year anniversary of FON. They are not new pictures but they are special to me, apparently I don't have much inspiration at the moment because I wanted to paint something but didn't succeed. I used to draw a lot of nice paintings in the past.

So the first picture was taken on Land Day last March, I find it inspiring whenever I look at it, it reminds me of my dedication to my people,



*Ali, Jeanne's father.*

to my future, and above all to the whole world. It reminds me of what I believe in: freedom, struggle for freedom, optimism, and overall happiness.

The second picture is one of my father with a view of Sakhnin, two very important factors in my life. I learned the meaning to strive for freedom from my father, he showed me the importance to live life with a noble goal in mind. His life was never easy, he struggled a lot to break free from his own community's restrictions and fulfill his ambitions, and to break free from imperialistic restrictions and discrimination. I have a huge respect for him because of that. Sakhnin, where I lived most of my life, stands for tradition and modernization, for a quiet life yet also for a history of strong resistance, for family, friends and also for helping and caring strangers. My dedication to Sakhnin is very strong as well.



**Yoa'd (1975)** was born in Nazareth and studied clinical psychology. She was a volunteer at CEGAS during the time she received financial assistance from the Friends of Nazareth (1998-1999).

**Being a woman** When I was 17, still learning at school, I was a candidate to be a president for our student council at school. I was the only girl candidate out of 3 candidates and the only girl ever to be nominated for such a position.

There was a process of election during which all candidates had to present themselves and talk about their contribution to the student movement if they were elected...I felt I was excellent in that, and my teacher told me I was ...still as you might imagine I was not elected. When trying to understand why by asking even good friend of mine who didn't vote for me the only answer I got was : ' you are a girl and we are afraid you can't lead us'. This was the first time ever I really understood that being a female is a point of weakness in my society, and that I would need to prove myself much more in order to feel equal.

I was raised in a family of two academic parents who studied in Russia, I have two sisters and no brothers. My parents' relation was always very much an equal division of missions inside and outside home. I never felt I had to apologize for being a girl, I believed I would always be judged as a person according to my achievements, values and behavior not according to my sex.

I was wrong.

What happened with me at school made me think that not only I was wrong but my parents were as well, because they made me believe that if you take personal responsibility concerning your children and be different, it is enough, change will occur....

I think my parents did a great job in my upbringing still there is a huge importance to take responsibility concerning your society as well- they are the bigger family you have and real change is more likely to occur if you make a difference to your society at large and not only to your small loving family.

From that day on I decided to ' look beyond my secure space' and always ask myself what can I do for my ;'larger family' , so that the day will come when women will not be judged according to their sex but according to who they really are.

I studied psychology, with the help of the Friends of Nazareth's generous donation. I could continue my M.A degree in clinical psychology and become one of the first female clinical psychologists in my country , until now 10 years later we are still only 3. I started volunteering at centers working with abused women who made me learn about my society much more.

Through CEGAS (the committee that I volunteered with during my M.A degree study) I understood that not only 'weak females and women' need our help but that there are also hundreds of 'strong enough' females full of abilities and capacities, who are not noticed due to lack of interest or attention for their capacities.

I learned to identify potential, to screen out those females that can be my friends on my way to make our society a better place for women to be in.

When I married and moved to Jerusalem, it was the same period when the security and political situation deteriorated much for Palestinians, at that time barriers were set all over the West Bank, men were denied access to their lands and to their normal places of work: mobility was very difficult. Believe it or not it was the time for the Palestinian women to find their way, in this period you could easily find that the majority of men were depressed and very sad for 'a reputation' that they lost, sitting at home, forbidden by soldiers to move while their wives were moving more freely through the checkpoints and barriers, finding jobs, and being financially responsible for their families.

Thousands of families were rescued due to the women struggling to keep the sanity of their husbands, children and themselves. The role of Palestinian women during this tough period was not only to ensure a source of living but also to ensure the family unity.

I wonder if time has come for women not to be active as 'the second best choice' only when there is no alternative or when their husbands are passive, but that women, their freedom, study and work are an 'equally good choice', even when there is an alternative.

I believe the best way to free our land from occupation is to free first our minds of rigidity and closeness, to enable each person in the society to have a role.

I work as a clinical psychologist in a clinic serving the Palestinian community, and I am also responsible for a rehabilitation program for the chronic mentally disturbed on the West Bank. I am fighting for the basic rights of women by means of my work, I fight so that the mentally ill female will get medical and psychiatric treatment and will not be afraid that she might not marry if this was revealed. I fight that women will decide themselves to marry or not to marry a mentally ill man and will not be obliged to do so because their family want them to. I fight so that females will go to school,

college and university, work and have some financial independence, be responsible for their families as well as for their society.

As one of the abused women, whose brother used to beat her whenever she tried to drive his car, said: ' He might be driving a car, leading his journey but I can lead a society'!.

I am a happy mother with two unique daughters and one son. I am obliged to make a difference in my society for the sake of myself, my children and my society.

I want to thank all those heroic women in my life and society who made me who I am.  
Thank you.



**Rozan** (1986) was born in Afula and is a sixth-year medical student at the Technion in Haifa. Her father comes from a traditional Bedouin community in the North of Israel. She does volunteer work at Ayed Home Association with the elderly and the handicapped.

## Marriage in Arab-Israeli society

Marriages in our society are performed under the auspices of the religious authority of the religious community to which couples belong. Each authority regulates marriages and divorces for their own community. There is no provision for inter-faith marriages. While people of different religions may be citizens of the State of Israel, all legal marriages performed in Israel must be sanctioned by religious authorities of one faith or another. Couples of mixed religion, for example a Christian and a Jew, or a Muslim and a Jew, cannot legally marry in Israel.



Muslim marriages are conducted in accordance with Islamic law and customs, and inter-community marriages are not permitted. Sharia courts deal with personal status issues in the Muslim community.

The Druze community was recognized as a separate community from the Muslim community in 1957. In 1962, separate Druze courts were established to deal with personal

status issues in the Druze community, alongside the rabbinical courts, the Sharia courts, and the

courts of the Christian communities. Inter-religious marriages are not permitted.

Since the establishment of the rabbinical courts, the status quo agreement, which does not recognize civil marriage, has been subject to criticism, but also to the strong support from the religious community. Opponents of the status quo consider the system to be contrary to people's civil rights. Although most of the debate relating to civil marriage is conducted in the Jewish community, the issue has the same implications for all other religious communities in Israel.

The procedures of a Palestinian wedding have a long tradition. During the preparations for the wedding many things are done that seem very important. Celebrations continue for several nights, one for the groom and his friends, one for the bride and her friends, and one for both of them. At the wedding there are many friends, swords, dancing, fancy clothes, cheering, and incredibly loud Arabic music. (At you-tube there are many examples of Palestinian wedding songs).

In addition the Bedouin community has its own traditions. My father is from a Bedouin family from the north. Families ties are very important and restrictive. That is not always easy. The position of the Bedouins themselves is not easy either, and this is certainly true of the women. It is great that I am given the opportunity to be the first woman in Daboriya who can develop herself intellectually with the help of a grant from the Friends of Nazareth.

When I get married, you will all be very welcome.



**Hana** (1952) was one of the first women to whom the Foundation Friends of Nazareth was introduced sometime in the 1980's. She first studied Public Administration in Jerusalem and later in The USA one of her subjects was clinical psychology. Still later, in the years 1999-2001, her daughter Irene was financially supported by the Friends of Nazareth in her studies of psychology. Irene fully agrees with her mother's contribution printed below.

*Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.*

*~ Helen Keller ~*

*We can do anything we want to do  
if we stick to it long enough.*

*~ Helen Keller ~*

These quotes by Helen Keller provided me with new ways to view myself. They motivated, inspired, and gave me the courage to break free from the chains of limiting belief patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to see their true power. I learned about Helen Keller when I was a teen age girl in middle school. I wondered how she was able "to make it," despite her physical limitations. When I learned her story I remember thinking that if she made it I, as well, will be able to "make it."

I grew up in Tel Aviv in a Jewish family. During my early years, following the establishment of Israel, the dominant atmosphere in Israel, was "we have to be strong as a nation surrounded by so many enemies." For that reason, the army played a central role in my society. With that, the role of men was glorified and society became more chauvinistic in which men became more powerful and dominant

than any other society around the world. Although women served in the army, as I did, but we were restricted to administrative and service jobs, and very few in fact were fighters. Women accepted their subordinate role in the Israeli society and in different fields of life. However, a few women were “given” the opportunity to fully participate in politics and other fields of life, as long as they helped advance the “national cause.” The fact that we had a female prime minister did not do much to women emancipation and equality in Israel.

Furthermore, Israel is a Jewish religious state. Its religious laws are ruling and dominating all aspects of life, in particular in family matters related to marriage, divorce, childcare, etc. In such traditional society women are stuck in roles that lack any power. The predominant role was that of submissiveness, victim hood, abuse and lack of self worth. Very few made it to the top. However, I believed then, and I still believe, that the change starts with each one of us. I believed that I am going to be whatever I want to be and face any challenging circumstances. After all, one only needs to take small steps at a time and challenge anything that will stand on his/hers way.

During my student years in Jerusalem, I came to realize that self fulfillment means that I have to develop my own career and become economically independent. Also, I realized that gender equality cannot be established while my society continues to occupy other people, the Palestinians. After my first child was born in late 1980's, I devoted more of my time to develop my career as an independent woman. I chose to work with Palestinian and Jewish Israeli women in an attempt to create bridges between the two societies. My solidarity was not only with the Palestinian women, who were oppressed not only by the occupier but also by the patriarchal system of their own society, but with the Israeli women as well. The idea was to empower women and make them a force in social change at the personal and the collective level. I thought that focusing on women's leadership roles and common interests would help in creating a common ground for both women across the dividing national line. I thought that ending the occupation would help in putting an end to the dominant role of men and that might help women get out of their marginal role in society. One of my first projects was the creation of a leadership program for women. The idea was to prepare and empower women to develop leadership skills and strategies for using their power and influence more effectively in their political organizations within their respective societies. During that program, Palestinian and Israeli women met on a regular weekly basis to learn and discuss their respective status in society and how the continued occupation contributes to their marginalization. The workshops devoted many hours to strategy planning for social change. For me it was more than just a job or a career. My vision was that women from both sides of the conflict would take leading roles in mobilizing their people toward resolving the conflict and work together side by side in establishing two democratic states that will work together toward a better future. My work was stopped when I was offered a fellowship at the Kennedy school of Government at Harvard University. Continued education seemed to me an opportunity to enrich myself academically, culturally, and professionally. In addition, I thought that at this stage of my career I needed more tools and empowerment to continue the work I had already started. After completing that program with a Masters degree at Harvard, my family and I decided to stay in the U.S.

For 9 years after my graduation from Harvard, I worked in the United States at the National Institute for Health as part of a research team working on sexual and physical child abuse. The goal of the research was to find ways to elicit as much information as possible from children who were physically and sexually abused. These children were often the only witness to their abuse and therefore it was important to find ways to enhance their information on the alleged abused as much as possible. In this career path, again, my efforts were directed at helping children, providing them with voice when their voice cannot be heard.

During the last few years, after going back to school and completing another master's degree in clinical psychology, the focus of my work is on providing assistance and support to the mentally ill population. I provide them with individual and group counseling, trying to re-integrate this population back into their normal daily routine. The lives of many of these individuals are shattered because of their mental illness. Quite often I meet people who are hopeless, helpless, and who feel they have no future to look forward to. My role is to instill hope, provide support and find creative venues in which these individuals can start their lives again.

When I look back at my career pattern I noticed that there is a distinct, common theme that is accompanying my work during all these years. "My moving spring," as you put it, is my strong drive to make a difference in the lives of others, especially those who are living in the margins of their societies, whether in Israel or here in the U.S. My solidarity is with all these groups that experiencing oppression, abuse and powerlessness.



**Amna** (1988) was born in Tira and is now a second-year student of dental hygiene. She works as a volunteer at Tira Medical Center.

## Women are more equal to men

Women play a very vital role in human progress and have a significant place in society. They are not at all inferior to men. They are

capable of sharing all the responsibilities of life. Man and woman have been rightly compared to the wheels of the same carriage. Islam has accorded an equal position to women in society. Islam realized the importance of women and granted them a very dignified position equal to man.

The main responsibility of a woman is to preserve the human race. As a mother, her position is unique. She brings up the children with extreme care. The first school of a child is the lap of his mother. It is quite true that great men had great mothers. Napoleon said:

**"Give me good mothers and I will give you a good nation."**



**The progress of a nation depends upon the way the mothers bring up their children. If the mothers are educated, the whole society will progress.** Women have always played an important role in the progress of a nation. In the early days of Islam, women worked side by side with men. In the battlefield, they nursed the injured, kept up the supplies and in certain cases even fought bravely. Florence Nightingale was the woman who led a very successful campaign for the reforms of hospitals and nursing profession. Women have been great saints, scholars, poets, writers, reformers and administrators.

Women should be given proper education and training. They should know what life is and how it should be lived. Educated women can do much to reform society. Many disturbances in society are created by those anti-social persons, who were brought up by wrong hands. In modern age, women are doing very well in all the fields of progress. They are demonstrating their talents in best. They are serving as teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators and even heads of states. More education for women means more progress for society.



**Fatma** (1986) lives in Um-el-Fahaem (central Israel) and is a fifth-year medical student at the Technion in Haifa. She is a volunteer at Um-el-Fahaem Medicinal Center.

### **Your double emancipation as woman: becoming an equal interlocutor, and woman in your society.**

When I was a little girl I wished I was born as a boy, so I could do whatever I wanted. But now I say thank god you created me a woman so that I can play the greatest roles in life; being a doctor and a mother. Even if it is a hard and long way. This change happened when I started to realize that as a woman I am strong enough and stronger than any man to do whatever I need or want to do. So I started to study and made very hard decisions and choices. In our community , when a girl is born, people feel sorry for her father, especially if he doesn't have a son, because people believe that he will be worried about her all the time even after she gets married. And unfortunately people are right: in our community the women suffer.



The author Ahlam Mosteghanemi

In my last report I gave you an example: In our community women get married when they are 17 or 18 years old and they have babies when they are 19-20 years old, they don't have the right to choose the perfect time to get married or to have babies. And people don't care whether you love the person you choose to share your future with or not. It is not acceptable to love or to have any relationship with a man. So most of the girls get married to their cousin or someone from the same family and that's why we have many genetic disorders.

Women must put "hejab" on their heads to cover their hair. I didn't choose to do it, I was taught that a good girl has to put it on and a "bad" girl does not put a hejab on her head.

So we, the women trying to make changes, doing many things that are not accepted in our society, we get married very late, we don't have many children, and work out of our houses. To be honest with you, people respect us,

although they won't let daughters to do the same things.

I believe that this 'discrimination' against women in our society will change, in fact we are witnessing these changes now. Maybe the rate is slow but I hope that one day we will see more and more independent and strong women in our society . And for me this hope is enough to believe that this will happen. We just need to be more patient , creative and strong to make these changes, and we really have many strong women in our society.

The picture that inspired me is the picture of an Arab author called Ahlam Mosteghanemi . In a career spanning over 25 years, the Algerian Mosteghanemi authored best-selling novels such as "Memory in the Flesh," "Chaos of the Senses" and "Passer by a Bed." She became the first Algerian woman to write a novel in the Arab language and the first contemporary Arab author to sell hundreds of thousands of copies of her work and dominate book charts for years in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, and the UAE. Her book " Chaos of the Senses" really helped me in my development to be the woman I want to be.



**Lobna** (1987) is a third-year student of Law and Business Accountancy at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzilva (IDC). She is a founder of the Sana Foundation.

## **Your double emancipation as woman: becoming an equal interlocutor, and woman in your society.**

Palestinian women, citizens of Israel seek double emancipation. The first is in the sphere of the ongoing struggle, as part of the internal Palestinian minority to become an equal citizen and interlocutor. The second is in the domestic and social sphere, struggling for equality in our own society.

I remember when I was a teenager, searching for a temporary job after graduating from high school, from one shop to an other, asking if they needed employees. The first question the owner asked:

"have you already done military service" I answered : "I'm under no obligation to serve in IFD" . Then the question after that would be : "What's your name? "Lobna". Then he would kindly ask me to leave my details so they could contact me. They didn't. After a whole month of searching I asked myself: "If I'm discriminated in finding a simple temporary job in a café or a shop, what is going to happen when I'll apply for "serious" positions after I graduate from university?"

Now I'm in my third year of Law & Business and starting to apply for internships in Law. What I have learned is that the best way is to be with the same abilities of an average Israeli student while the Arab language is an advantage. I have heard some of my friends say: 'Why should I go and study? I'm going to be discriminated anyway.' I believe that real empowerment is the belief in yourself, in your ability, and the courage to do things differently while reaching your goals.

In this complex reality women have an other obstacle: society. Unfortunately the idea of a woman being independent, a person of her own choice, is not common in our Palestinian society. When I see how my cousins are engaged at the age of 17-19, I always ask my grandmother (who is the one responsible for their marriage) 'Why the rush? Why won't she go and study? Isn't that better for her? My grandmother usually answers: 'Her husband will educate her (he will pay and be responsible for university if she wants to study after marriage)'. At this point I want to refer to a quote by Audre Lorde ""The Master's tools can never dismantle the Master's house".

The house is the one traditionally built by the husband. Is my cousin supposed to dismantle his house with his tools, if necessary? The answer is no. When she gets married all the power (tools) will be in his hands, she will always depend on him.

I want to make these women think about their future in a more independent way, so they can decide



*Mona Hatoum, Roadworks 1985. Performance, Brixton, London Photo: Patrick Gilbert; Courtesy: The artist and White Cube London © Mona Hatoum.*

*Mona Hatoum was born into a Palestinian family in Beirut, Libanon in 1952 and now lives and works in London and Berlin. She has participated in numerous important group- and solo exhibitions.*

for themselves. This brings me to summarize the two aspects that I mentioned above to this quote: "To accomplish great things, we must dream as well as act" (Anatole France, French novelist 1844-1924).

1) The Picture with the feet & boots- After looking at many of her art works I felt this picture expresses the tension between the "Track" we are supposed to go in- the boots, which symbolize the norms and rules that we are expected to obey. Whereas her feet, with no boots, are trying to go an other way, 'her way', but are still tied to the boots. This shows the complexity of trying to break down conventions.



**Mona** (1989), is a second-year student of dietetics at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She does volunteer work at the Alslam Association, a elderly care center.

## My home - Palestine

'My Home' , one of the many issues I am dealing with and thinking about daily. My home means a lot for me; I cannot define it , I think that 'home' is a term we cannot define, we cannot describe or explain 'home', but yes we can feel, we can have a vision of it.

Home is the base or the seed, from which faith, love, success and humanity grow. Here in Israel we face a big dilemma: we miss our home although we have one! Often I cannot understand how we can live here; how we live with people who were the cause of us losing our home; it is difficult to think about this, to image, but yes I do; I think that Arabs here suffer from a 'mental war", a war that asks for a lot of patience.

In spite of this "mental war" we face here every moment, we are very strong, we have spiritual weapons that help us to survive, to cope with the circumstances, and to accept them and try to improve them.



In the beginning it was hard for me to accept this situation here, but in the end I learned how 'My Home- Palestine' is now the word that motivates me and helps me in my development to be the woman I always hope to be: the woman of whom her home, her occupied home, is proud and for whom it is waiting, a woman strong and educated in order to support her society and humanity.

My home

I always dreamed of peace here and in the entire world, every moment I pray for a peaceful, for a quiet world, away from violence, wars and blood; I think that our humanity is wounded.

Often I wonder whether life and love have a chance, when you see how children are killed daily and how massacres are committed; it is really so sad to be witness to this suffering.....

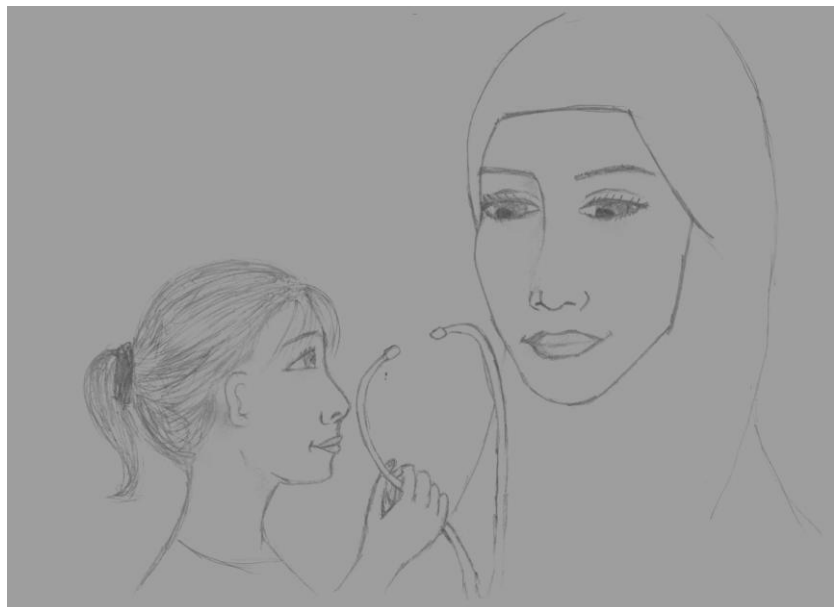


**Amal (1988)** was born in Hadera and is a third-year medical student at the Technion in Haifa. She works as a volunteer at Alnoor local clinic in Haifa.

### **Your double emancipation as woman: becoming an equal interlocutor, and woman in your society.**

The Arab woman has overcome many difficulties and social restrictions. She has solved many problems in Arab society, particularly, the Arab women who have lived in Israel since 1948.

This society of great women could learn -in high schools and universities- various subjects including difficult ones that require a long period of studying and much hard work, such as medicine, which is known by its importance and its difficulties. It's very hard to be accepted to study medicine and it is very expensive to do.



It is obvious that Arab women have stepped towards emancipation in many aspects and fields, social, political and economical. There were many restrictions for women and they were banned from studying, working, and being artists. A woman was forbidden to be responsible for her environment, family, and kids. So, she broke these manacles and chains in order to achieve equality with man. Now, she is sharing many responsibilities and is struggling to get national and civilian rights. In addition, many women have a job, such as that of lawyer, doctor, engineer, nurse, judge, poet, lecturer, in spite of the unchanged negative social attitude towards them.

This implies that there is ambivalence as regards the treatment of women. On the one hand men believe in freedom and equality, but on the other hand they patronize women and treat them as non-

human beings. They see women as 'a machine' to gratify their sexual desires. Moreover, they think that her main job is cooking.

In fact, our society, which has witnessed many social and cultural changes, still sticks to stereotypes, opinions and attitudes that disregard women's capabilities and abilities. Fortunately, there are some foundations which want to support women in their ambitions, aspirations, and dreams about emancipation and their wish to be equal interlocutors, and furthermore to help them break out of the restrictions of ignorance and stupidity.

I think, as an optimistic Arab student, full of ideas and dreams, that our Arab Palestinian society needs development and a liberal modern human outlook on women. In addition, religious, cultural and political sectors must give up negativity, isolation and distance from truth. They should immediately work and change the position of women, and try and help them fight prejudice and all wrong ideas that don't suit our age and like a stone obstruct developments. In order to achieve those dreams we, women, should speak out and take part in all aspects and fields of life and try all experiences without fear or shame. We should defy and challenge all situations and changes without apathy or despair because any success, even if it's simple, will give us energy and an opportunity to achieve more success, emancipation and freedom.