

From: Gifted Arab Gifted Arab Child in Israel, by Hanna David (pp. 124-142)

The life story of Prof. Fadia Nasser-Abu Alhija

Here is the life story of Prof. Fadia Nasser-Abu Alhija, who has succeeded in overcoming all possible barriers to higher education and becoming a role model for many Arab women and women in general.

Prof. Fadia Nasser-Abu Alhija is professor at the School of Education of Tel Aviv University, where she heads the Department of Curriculum Planning and Instruction and the Program for Research, Measurement and Evaluation Methods. Previously, she was research coordinator for GRE testing at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, NJ (USA). Her main research topics are measurement and evaluation of gender- and culture-related achievements; evaluation of teachers and teaching, and the structural validity of testing methods. Prof. Nasser-Abu Alhija earned her Ph.D. in Research, Evaluation, Measurement and Statistical Methods from the University of Georgia (U.S.) in 1997.

Prof. Nasser-Abu Alhija's areas of research are: research methods, measurement, evaluation and statistics. Her PhD thesis was: The Performance of Regression-Based Variations of the Screen Procedure for Determining the Number of Common Factors.

In the last 30 years Prof. Nasser-Abu Alhija has taught and instructed mathematics at high school, college and university level. She has participated in various teams, in Israel and abroad, whose expertise has been the evaluation of students and staff members. She was a member of 15 academic committees, including the research committee of the Mofet Institute,¹ The committee for undergraduate students at the school of Education, Tel Aviv University; a few professional committees of the Israeli Ministry of Education,

¹ **The MOFET Institute** is a center for the research and development of programs in teacher education and teaching in Israeli teachers' colleges.

such as the permanent committee for the chief scientist and the The *Walter Lebach Institute for Jewish-Arab Coexistence* through Education.

Until 2006 Prof. Nasser participated in about 30 international conferences, won 8 scholarships and research grants, including the prestigious 450,000 shekel [~110,000\$] grant divided among 3 winners on evaluation research of the mentoring process of pre-service teachers. Prof. Nasser is also a dedicated lecturer; between 200 and 2006 8 students have written masters theses under her supervision.

Until 2007 Prof. Nasser had published about 40 articles and book chapters, prepared about 15 research reports and edited a book – with two co-editors on math education. Taking into consideration that she had received her PhD in 1997 it is indeed an extraordinary achievement.

Q: Please tell me about your childhood.

A: I was born in Tira ([Arabic: الطيرة](#)), an [Arab](#) city in the [Center District of Israel](#), to a family of 10 children, 4 of them were boys. I was child no. 5: when I was born my parents had already 3 boys and a girl; after me came 4 more girls and one son. I was a part of a farm *family living* on the land. My father was the only son of his mother; he was orphaned when just 3 months old. His mother never re-married: she raised him and worked the land her late husband had left for him. Her hard work and modest life style made it possible for her to save money and buy more land, so when my father grew up he was the owner of both the inherited and bought land.

Q: How do you remember yourself as a child?

A: I was an equal partner in the family farm, exactly as all my siblings: brothers as well as sisters. In the early years we were working the fields in a more traditional way. We grew mostly vegetables watered partially watered by the rain. Later, when two of my older brothers grew up and graduated from the youth village: "Ha' Kfar Ha'Yarok" ("The Green Village", located at the south of [Ramat HaSharon](#)), where they had majored in agriculture, we started with modern agriculture: hothouses for vegetables and strawberries, as well as orchards. Working in agriculture was going on for many years: only when the family

started splitting, and each of the members started her or his own career, my brothers quitted working as farmers, and today only one of them, a teacher, is still cultivating a vineyard.

Q: You mentioned that two of your brothers went to the agricultural high-school "Ha'Kfar Ha'Yarok". Which school did the other brothers attend?

A: Most of my siblings have higher education. My eldest brother holds a university degree; he had been a bank manager until his retirement. The second brother is a school teacher; the third did not get higher education and the fourth has PhD in water ecology. The level of education of my sisters is as high as that my brothers: two are qualified nurses with a Master's degree; they both have high rank careers in nursing. Two other sisters are high school graduates; they both work as secretaries. The fifth sister is a school counsellor holding a Master's degree and studying for her PhD.

Q: How did one Tira family achieve such a high rate of highly qualified professionals?

A: As I have mentioned, my father was an only son. Thus, his main aspiration was to have a large family, and indeed, he had one. In our society it is the custom that a good standing means having a large, successful family. My father had encouraged all of us to study. My late mother, who was illiterate until her death, practically pushed all of us – boys and girls – to acquire education. In addition, we were comparatively liberal. For example: neither the boys nor the girls were ever told what to do. There were no specific expectations, but rather support of our aspirations who were nurtured by our parents. I think that the "education chain" started when my two older brothers went to Jewish schools, and we all followed them when looking for the best education sources available for us. This situation went on in the next generation, with my nephews and nieces, 28 males and females, who already have four grandchildren. One of my nephews is a doctor, and three more – two nieces and one nephew – are medical students: two at the Tel Aviv University and one at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

In addition, it is important to mention, that indulgence did not exist at home. We all started our day working in the fields, before going to school, and returned to the fields after school. We were educated to be diligent and keep always busy.

Q: Did you get any enrichment in addition to school instruction?

A: Hardly any. I studied in the first biology track opened in Tira. At the beginning of the year there were 21 students in the class; only 6 of them were girls. It was not until we were in grade 11 that a doctor was recruited for enrichment tutoring in biology. The learning of all other subjects depended on our motivation and initiatives. I, for example, studied English by correspondence. However, as I have already mentioned, the everyday routine was coming back home to the strawberries field rather than to afternoon learning activities. As there was no spare time there was no idleness either.

Q: Can you describe your living conditions?

A: The conditions were far from what is customary nowadays. At the beginning we all lived in 2.5 room house. However, unlike many other Arab villages at that time – we already had electricity and flowing water.

Q: Did you have specific subjects that interested you during childhood? When did you start thinking about your future profession or occupation?

A: Until grade 9 I studied in a single sex class. In grade 10 we started studying in mixed sex classes. When I was in the company of girls I understood from my teachers and some of my peers that there were gender differences, such as in subjects of interest and future aspirations. My parents were the only people that made me believe that there are no differences between me and my brothers regarding my subjects of interest and professional choices. Thus I perceived myself as a part of the boys ' attribution group and did my best to compete with them. I had always been highly perfectionist and competitive, and the idea of competing against boys started even before studying with boys, when the only boys I met were my family members. My high level perfectionism made me sometimes argue with a teacher if a boy in my class got a grade half a point [of 100, H.D.] higher than me... I actually excelled in all school subjects, without any preference. I recall that I had a perfect grade 11 school report: the highest possible notes in all subjects. It was very important for me that no boy got any higher notes than I.

Q: How did this influence your social standing in the classroom?

A: My peers perceived me as "behaving like a man". I was assertive, with high self-confidence, and a reliable, well-developed personality. When people said about me: "her word is a man's word" I accepted it as a compliment, rather than an insult or cursing...

Q: What was your parents' position in this matter?

A: I felt that even my parents had more confidence in me than in my brothers. For example: my father was in local politics for many years and served as a member of the Tira council. When I was just 18, upon graduating from school, I helped my father during the local elections. This was very unusual [for a girl, H.D.], but with his blessing, feeling my family trusted me and let me participate in this activity without hesitation.

Q: When was the first time you left home?

A: I started studying at the Tel Aviv University after graduating from high school; at this stage I was still living at home. Only later, during a more advanced stage of my studies, I moved to the university dorms and lived there for one year. After many more years, when I was already holding a Master's degree and working as a teacher for years, I left for the US to study for my PhD, where I stayed 4 years. When in the Tel Aviv dormitory, as well as while living in the US, I knew that my family trusted me completely; my parents knew I was conforming to both social and religious norms, and in fact, up to now I live according to these principles, and have nothing to hide.

Q: What did you choose to study at the Tel Aviv University and why?

A: When I started studying at the Tel Aviv University I was not aware of all possibilities I could have chosen from. As I was interested in many subjects – something that had not changed until now – and good at all subjects, I chose to study general science, which was a combination of mathematics, chemistry and biology. Studying these subjects allowed me not to focus right at the beginning in just one subject, as is the usual situation in Israeli higher education. This choice had to do with the fact that I was interested in science, but not in just one area of it. However, even though I was both an excellent student in the humanities and loved studying them, I could not take any courses of them; it was simply

too much. I gave up on the humanities probably because science was more challenging. When thinking about it now I am not quite sure that I was better at math and science than at the humanistic subjects. No doubt I was linguistically gifted, which helped me a lot in the academia, but when I got to the university I was comparatively young,² and chose what seemed to me both interesting and challenging.

Q: Was the track of general science more difficult than that of one scientific subject or two subjects?³

A: I am not sure – I know that I was able to choose among many possibilities, and I made that specific choice because I wanted to study science and at the same time expand my areas of interest to more than one or two subjects. I think I also wanted to prove that I was not like everybody else, that even though I took a lot upon myself I still succeeded.

Q: When did you understand that your Hebrew needed a serious upgrading?

A: I was always good both in Hebrew and English, and during my high school studies I never felt I had any problem in these two foreign languages. But when for the first time I attended lectures in Hebrew, I had a double problem: because of the fast speed it was hard for me to understand, and I also had a problem catching up while writing in Hebrew. During the first university year I found it hard to follow the learning in the classroom, and I needed to learn a lot at home, from books. I had not expected such a situation, especially because in addition to my high grades in Hebrew I had been growing in a house with two brothers attending a Jewish high school, brothers who had overcome the language problem. In addition, my father had quite often Jewish visitors at our house, and during these visits we all conversed in Hebrew.⁴

² Jews usually start university after the mandatory army service, so for girls the minimal age is 2 and for boys – 21, while Arabs so not have to serve in the army so they can start their academic studies at age 18.

³ In Israel the undergraduate student needs to choose one major, and in some subjects – two majors upon registration to the university, which might be, for Arab students, at age 17.

⁴ In spite of the fact that Arabic has been a formal language in Israel for many years, as well as the mother tongue not only of Arabs living in Israel but that of a very high rate of Jews coming from Arabic countries, even in the 70ies and 80ies, during the childhood and adolescence of Prof. Nasser, only rarely Jews conversed with Arabs in Arabic.

Another reason that made it difficult for me to transfer to learning in Hebrew was that most of my teachers did not particularly encourage their students to be more proficient in Hebrew, like they did in English. English had always been perceived as prestigious and important; I personally had a good English teacher who supported me and encouraged my English learning. My parents did the same and made me feel I had to put a special effort in order to excel in English, as had been proven the right decision when I continued my studies. The situation regarding Hebrew was different, and thus moving from learning in Arabic to learning in Hebrew was not smooth.

Q: Did you have Arab friends at this stage of your studies?

A: As I studied mathematics with math students, biology with biology students and chemistry with chemistry students, I knew students from all these departments. In math there were only 2-3 Arab students in year one, but both in biology and chemistry the number was larger. But I became friends mainly with Jewish colleagues. My best friend during my BSc studies was a Jewish older woman, who was already working as a teacher. We even studied together for some of our examinations. I also studied with a woman who is currently a supervisor for the learning of math in the ministry of education. Another colleague who studied with me for a teaching certificate in math was Prof. Dina Tirosh.⁵ Judith Ram – currently also from the Tel Aviv university – studied with me for the Master's degree. I am still in touch with many female and male colleagues whom I had met during my university studies.

Q: Why did you not mention any Arab female peers or colleagues?

A: at that time there were hardly any female Arabs in the Tel Aviv campus. During my first 3 years of studies, when I was still living at home, it did not think it was important to look for Arab friends, especially because I did not meet any on a daily basis. During my fourth years of studies, when I was living on campus, I had limited social connections with female Arab students, but I continued my connections with Jews as well.

⁵ Dina Tirosh is professor of science education in the School of Education at Tel-Aviv University. Her main areas of research are the acquisition and development of mathematical concepts; intuitive rules in science and mathematics; and teacher training and professional development for teachers of mathematics.

Q: After receiving your first degree, which you had chosen also because it enabled you to somewhat delay your professional choice, you finally did have to make a choice. How did you come to your final decision?

A: Before choosing the track for my Master's degree I studied for a teaching certificate. At this stage I already had to make a decision and I chose to study for a math certificate, the area perceived as the most difficult of my the three I studied. Even before being entitled to my certificate I started teaching math at the junior high school in Tira, my hometown. The next stage was teaching at the local high school, and then – preparing the students for the matriculation math examination.

Q: Why did you not continue your studies in math?

A: Learning math was very difficult. In addition, I failed to see how learning pure math at a higher level was of use for anything. Thus I preferred to go ahead in an area as close to math as possible, but it had also to be useful. The closest such area I found in the School of Education was research methods. At the end my choice had proven highly profitable: this area is quite unique and has become my main area of research for many years.

Q: Was it easy and smooth for you to be accepted for the Master's degree?

A: No at all. My first degree grade average was below the minimum required for a Master's degree. The late Dr. Itai Zak, who headed the department at that time, interviewed me after I had applied, and said: "you seem to be a promising student, but I cannot accept you because of your law grade average". I answered him: "If you find another Arab female who wishes to study in this track – accept her; otherwise – please take me". He then decided to accept me under the condition that my first year average in my Masters studies must be higher than 80.⁶ That year I had an average of 92; I received my degree "cum laude".

⁶ "80" is the equivalent of "B".

Q: How old were you when getting your Masters degree?

A: 29.

Q: This is not considered particularly young. Did you think of continuing studying for your PhD immediately?

A: I did not think about getting a PhD at all. During my studying I was working as a teacher not just full time but as much as 133%. I was very busy, so in spite of graduating "cum laude" my university studies were not easy for me. In addition, for two years I also studied in a program for school headmasters/mistresses. I did that in spite of the fact that Prof. David Chen, one of my teachers, said to me: "instead of doing it you could have already finished half of your PhD!" Prof. More encouragement came from Prof. Dina Tirosh, who offered to be my PhD instructor. But I loved teaching; later I became a teachers' instructor, and did not wish to stop doing it. Thus, I did not think about the academia as an option. I should not be forgotten that I had no role model – at that time there was not even one female Arab in the academia. As a matter of fact – I did not know even one single Arab male in the academia!

Q: You are certainly aware of being a role model now. When, in your opinion, you started being one for young Arabs, especially for females?

A: I think it started when I was a teacher at the Tira high school. The girls knew I was young and single, with a respectable profession and high status. Maybe having my own car helped also... At that time my students already used to tell me they wanted to be like me.

Q: What had finally changed your mind regarding studying for a PhD?

A: In 1991 a friend told me that the American embassy had offered grants for graduate studies in the US. After the falling of the USSR, which resulted in stopping the massive flow of Arab students studying in communist countries, the American embassy published a call for proposals for The Israeli-Arab Scholarship Program (IASP). When I heard about it I thought: "why not? I have nothing to lose" and registered for the English examinations in Nazareth. I thought about it as a game, because psychologically I was not ready to

travel abroad on my own at all. Of the 100 people who took the test, 25 were invited to an interview, and after receiving the GRE results 4-5 students were chosen, including me. I was actually the first student in this program who received her PhD thanks to this grant: the total time I stayed in the US for it was 3 years and 9 months.

Q: How had you chosen the higher education institute where you studied? Did you have preliminary knowledge regarding making the decision where to study?

A: We had been asked to write our preferences on the grant forms but I had no preference as I did not know any of the potential places... Dina Tirosh recommended that I enrol in the University of Georgia because of the high level of its didactics of mathematics department, so in spite of the fact that I had also been accepted to the *Florida Institute of Technology* (Florida Tech), I decided to study in Georgia.

Q: At this stage you were still single. Was there no objection to your traveling to study abroad?

A: I was already old enough so nobody could tell me what to do. At this stage I had a good professional and personal name, and a high status. I was socially accepted – though "with a pinch of salt". In general it was considered ok to study abroad, but a woman who became "too educated", who reached out of the consensus limits, was considered frightening in private life. In a chauvinistic society, where gender roles are very clear, each change in life circumstances might not be well perceived by everybody. I was aware of that, and took the risks. At the end I married a man who accepted the situation as it was, a man who is happy to have me the way I am. But at that time I was concerned only about my professional life and did not care much about any other life aspects.

Q: How do you perceive today, after a few decades, the influence of living in Tira on you unique professional career?

A: Being a comparatively large city Tira had a high school since 1952. The level in this school was higher at my time than today; thus I did not have to study anywhere else until high school graduation. Many graduates of this school became highly professional. For example: a few of my peers became doctors and one – a professor in The Volcani Institute

of Agricultural Research. The school was a center of education for good students from the neighborhood villages as well.

Another advantage of living in Tira, in addition to its size, was its location. Being located close to other towns villages made it possible to mix with other populations – both Arab and Jewish, whom we met during mutual visits. Easy access to Tel Aviv was very significant: there was no problem to travel to Tel Aviv and back for all possible aims.

Tira had also good access to the work market – especially in the education area. This advantage was, however, geographically limited: Nazareth had been in my time, and still is, the best location for Arabs regarding education, thanks to the excellent Christian schools there. However, in the central district of Israel Tira was – and still is – a very good place to grow for young Arabs.

Q: When you speak about access to education – do you refer only to males?

A: Yes. In my father's time only boys had access to education, and only some of them actually studied. My father had only 8 years of education; in order to continue studying he had to travel to Qalqilya ([Arabic](#): قلقيلية), a [Palestinian](#) city in the [West Bank](#), which he did not do. My father was an autodidact: he learnt a lot by himself, including speaking fluent Hebrew. During his time women hardly ever learnt at all.

Q: If you can describe the difficulties an Arab student – even an excellent one – had, and still has to overcome, what, in your opinion, would be her or his first educational crisis you would mention?

A: Arriving at the university would cause the first crisis. With me it happened in the first algebra and calculus classes. Both these subjects have no similarity whatsoever to high school math; as a result I did not understand anything during classes. Many students do not know that high school math is completely different from university math. At the university you hardly see numbers: everything is abstract. Even the lecturers seem abstract to you... The other subjects we studied were not easy either: the methods, the language, the tutoring level – everything was substantially different from what I had been

used to. But the most difficult thing was, no doubt, the learning of completely new subjects, all so abstract.

Q: What would you advice to a student facing such difficulties?

A: The most important thing is not to break down. If you get a very low grade, even if you fail, you must try to survive. Not to drop out. Indeed, it is most irritating when you fail for the first time. A thinking turning point is when you say: OK, it happened to me for the first time. Shall I give up and study something else? I, a person who have perceived herself as a successful person, will give up? I learnt not to do that. I knew I had to get my degree no matter what, even if my grade average was not to be high, as I wanted a high prestige degree from a respectable university. I adopted this way of thinking during my BSc studies, though it almost destroyed my prospects to study for a second degree.

Q: Can you generalize from you situation to all Arab students?

A: The problem I had to deal with is obviously common to many Arab students who have to compete, for the first time, with students who had studied in a different education system. There is no similar situation of a minority population who studies in an education system of its own until the age of 18, and then is expected to fit into a new system with different demands. I cannot estimate now how high the education level in our school was at that time. Of course, we were trained to study and learn in order to succeed in the matriculation examinations, and we knew exactly what to materials we had to master n order to do that, but these facts did not eliminate the gaps in the level of instruction between our school and many Jewish schools. These gaps existing up to now – were at that time very large. In any case, in spite of the excuses I could have used I did not think I needed any; no matter how difficult it was for me I knew there was only one option for me: to hang on.

Q: Who gave you this *straightforward* message: "you must hang on"?

A: I did not anybody in order to know that. I knew how important it was not to return home without a certificate. Thus I learnt from my mistakes, when not doing so well in the term

examinations and improved my grades after re-taking the same examinations. Every time I had fallen down I stood up and started walking again.

Up to now I use to say to my students: the difference between first and second degree students is not necessarily their abilities, but rather the work they are willing to put in, their persistence and their belief in their ability to get the finish line. A person with self-discipline and persistence who has a clear goal will get to it.

A graduate of the Arab education system, which is warm, supporting and understanding, where the teacher would do a lot to have you succeed, where you always have someone to talk to, will find it very difficult to be a minority within a minority, a female Arab student in a Jewish higher education institution. The lecturer has no idea how to approach you, at the beginning you don't even understand, in many cases, what he is talking about. The natural tendency could be to think: "what do I need this for?", but it is crucial to overcome this tendency.

Q: Do you think you would have repeated this experience – of learning in the track you had chosen at age 18?

A: Yes I do, but maybe I think so today, when having enough self-confidence and belief in my abilities. For an 18-year old Arab girl who had just left her home village or town it must be very different. In retrospect I can say that for me this unique track proved highly rewarding. I have no regrets.

Q: would you recommend for an Arab young woman a less widthwise track?

A: A widthwise track is certainly both rewarding and interesting. It also helps to expand the circle of people one knows. However, when taking such a track it is usually difficult to compete with more focused people who walk on more linear path. Such people do not have to start a new learning track again and again.

Thus, in order to get better guidance I recommend focusing on one channel and walking through it in the best possible way, and as quickly as it can be done. Today, when many young Arabs – male and female – get high education, it is possible to become an expert

in a narrow discipline, to "go for it", to learn it through and excel in it. Such a path undoubtedly saves a lot of time and energy.

Q: Does your area of expertise have any disadvantages?

A: Yes. For example: because of the uniqueness of my area I am asked by many organizations and people to participate in a variety of committees, and I find it hard to refuse. The dilemma: "what has preference, my personal advancement or involvement for the advantage of society" is always there. This is one of my daily conflicts. I still say almost always "yes" to such requests and thus I have hardly time for my research that will award me professorship.⁷

Q: You mentioned earlier the problem of the educational gap between the Jewish and the Arab sectors. Do you think of any solution for closing this gap?

A: Since the declaration of the state of Israel, there has never been mixed education for Arabs and Jews. Since the end of the Israeli Martial law that did not allow Arabs free passage from their place of residence to another place,⁸ there is no official barrier against such education. Now it is possible for Arabs to study in Jewish schools located in Jewish towns, Kibbutzim or villages, and vice versa. However, when such education exists it is always in one direction: an Arab seeking good education would send her or his children to a Jewish school, but not the other way round. Arabs must learn Hebrew, which is the language of the majority; Jews have the privilege not to know Arabic. But while the learning of Hebrew, as the law requires, should have helped the improvement of Jewish-Arab relationships, it actually did, in many cases, the opposite: it caused many Arabs to learn a lot about Jewish culture instead of about their own culture.

⁷ As mentioned, Ptof. Nasser had already been appointed as a professor at the Tel Aviv University.

⁸ Military administrative government was in effect from 1949 to 1966 over some geographical areas of [Israel](#) having large [Arab](#) populations, primarily the [Negev](#), [Galilee](#), and the [Triangle](#). The residents of these areas were subject to a number of controlling measures that amounted to martial law. Permits from the military governor had to be procured to travel more than a given distance from a person's registered place of residence, and [curfew](#), [administrative detentions](#), and expulsions were common.

Q: Do you think that mixed – Jewish-Arab – schools will help decrease the educational gap and maybe even solve it?

A: I do not know what can be done now, whether it is possible in the current social-political situation. In my opinion mixed education must be established from the beginning: at the kindergarten level. A mixed- Jewish-Arab kindergarten is to teach in both languages and focus on subjects taken from each culture. In school the core subjects, especially math, science and technology, should be easily accommodated for both populations. There is, however, a problem with subjects such as history, citizenship, or literature; there is a need to come to an agreement about all aspects of teaching them. In the present situation it is not easy to implement such a program, but I believe it is possible if both Arab and Jewish cultures are to be taught. In a more convenient political context it can be materialized with much less difficulties.

Q: I have not asked you yet about your life as a married woman in Kaukab,⁹ a place quite different from Tira...

A: My working full time in Tel Aviv does not enable me full participation in the life of the village I moved to when getting married. Thus my social life there is limited. I spend a lot of time in Sakhnin,¹⁰ where I also teach [at the local teachers' college, Prof. Nasser is the head of the research and evaluation unit there]. I still travel often to Tira, where my family lives, but my connections there are not as strong as they had been before. While living in Tira my peers, colleagues and friends did not necessarily live there. As Tira is comparatively a large town, it has all public institutions that a person might need, so I did not need to travel elsewhere in order to arrange any official or bureaucratic matter, but rather for social or professional reasons. It is quite different now, when I live in the village

⁹ Kaukab Abu al-Hija ([Arabic](#): كوكب أبو الهيجا), often called simply Kaukab, (meaning "star"), is an [Arab Muslim](#) village and [local council](#) in the [North District](#) of [Israel](#), in the [Lower Galilee](#).

¹⁰ Sakhnin (سخنين) is a city in [Israel's North District](#), located in the [Lower Galilee](#), about 23 kilometres east of [Acre](#).

of Kaukab¹¹...On the other hand, Kaukab has an advantage over Tira, exactly because of being small and geographically far from the center of the country. It is a very quiet place. In addition to my office at the Tel Aviv University office and the one at the Sakhnin College I have a home study, and I can work at home with less interruptions than elsewhere. Actually I work in all these places, and maintain my research connections not only with my colleagues from the Tel Aviv University colleagues but also with researchers from Beit Berl College¹² and many abroad peers.

Q: Did your marriage change the frequency of your travelling abroad?

A: In the past I used to go abroad for 6 weeks to 2 months every summer. I had been spending my 2003 Sabbatical in Boston: I had been staying there 8 months. I am used to travelling to Georgia, where I have professional connections since my PhD period. I also stayed twice in Norway, where I was living in a flat close to the university. By the way – each room in this apartment is rented to a researcher from another country, which enabled me to meet researchers from all over the world – an amazing experience by itself.

Since my getting married I have moderated both the number and duration of my trips. I still travel abroad once or twice a year. But it should be emphasized, that moderating my travelling was my initiative, without any external pressure. I did not cancel any journey because of my marriage, but I did change a few things, in addition to less travelling abroad. For example: I allow myself, once in a while, to go out with my husband for the whole day, just because we feel like it. I have learnt to seize the day!

Q: if we already mentioned your life as a married woman – are you willing to share with us how you deal with the house tasks?

¹¹ Kaukab Abu al-Hija had a total population of about 2800 in 2600, when this interview was conducted. At the end of December 2011 the number of its inhabitants was 2,875; with a 3.6% yearly increase of its population there were about 2980 people living there at the beginning of 2012.

¹² Beit Berl is a Jewish academic college, the largest in Israel in number of students (approximately 8,000) and the range of programs it offers. It is located less than 3 miles from Tira, thus it has a high rate of both Arab students and staff members. It includes a school of education, a school of art, and academic institute for training Arab teachers and the school of society and government.

A: Until now I have been taking care of the [domestic chores](#) by myself, without external help. While living at my parents' house I did not cook at all, and now I learnt, with my husband's help, to cook and even to bake. I learnt how to operate a mixer and a vacuum cleaner! Now I consider hiring a cleaning lady. I am not obsessed with cleanliness, but the maintenance of a house requires constant maintenance which takes a lot of time.

Q: For the summary I'll be very grateful if you share with the readers some advices or ideas about education based on your experience and knowledge.

A: Here are some highlights:

1. Education might be leverage for everybody, but particularly for women. Young girls and adolescent females: please note, that does not make a difference, what you intend to do in the future: it is important that you have some professional certificate. Education means wider horizons, another way of thinking, having a different perspective on life, a different, richer way of relating to others, a key to both a better society and a better life.

2. The aim of learning at the Arab college is to train the present generation so it will educate the next one. Mothers who get training as teachers will use their skills and knowledge for raising and educating their own children as well. The profit will be tripled: to the school, to the family and to the community. Even if college graduates do not work as teachers, their training and education will serve them in other professions they might find themselves in.

3. Persistence is of huge importance. It is necessary to start thinking about a purpose and aim from a young age, persist in working towards it and prepare oneself in the best possible way, in accordance with being aware of our abilities and possibilities. The goals we set must be reachable in order not to give up because of extreme difficulties, and choose something we really love and are interested in rather than for pleasing anybody else. In order to materialize this aim society must be more open and more supportive by creating programs assisting young people understand better both themselves and their abilities.

4. Girls should not give up even in cases there are difficulties caused by tradition, religion, or manners of behavior. But, it should be done gracefully rather than provocatively or harshly. The only way to reach an agreement is to try to persuade others, and be open to be persuaded by others. Indeed, sometimes it is easier to blame traditional, familial or congregational ways of life and use them as an excuse for not trying to come to a modus Vivendi. An Arabic proverb says: "It is impossible to go [directly] from the bottom to the handles", namely, no skipping is possible, but rather walking carefully and advancing gradually. This way prospects for success are higher than by making scenes and initiating demonstrations.

This issue should be raised to the awareness of the community as a whole. Not including women in the economics of the Arab community is giving up their potential. In many cases we, women, constitute our obstruction. In addition, education must not be the only option an Arab girl has to live home. She should also be allowed to be a part of the working force. In order to get there we must widen our circle of occupations.

Economic independence does not mean living alone, but rather – having one's source of earning. Contributing to the financial resources influences the partnership in the family. A woman with an independent financial source has a higher social standing, her voice counts. The improvement of the financial situation – simultaneously with the improvement of the personal standing – they all enable the new generation better opportunities, the possibility to get things their parents could not afford. They all offered a better starting point for the next generation.

Thank you!

Three years after I had conducted this interview, Dr. Nasser was appointed as a professor at the Tel Aviv University.