

HOW MY INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE HAS AFFECTED MY VIEW OF THE WORLD



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In my teenage years I used to be known of my extreme admiration of the second channel on Jordanian TV that was called by the time "The second Amman". All of this channel shows were famous english shows starting from the educational show Beakman's World up to Friends, Opra, Nikita, and the list goes. I get to know a lot about American culture, What is good and what is bad , their sense of humor, their American spirit , their values and their problems. I was so taken by the freedom, the equality and diversity among other aspects that define USA. I was seeing myself there one day. I still remember my feelings when I got the call from DHL informing me that my passport with my student visa are ready for pickup, till then the dream turned real. I was flying in a bubble, with all the thoughts of visiting places I always wanted to see, presuming my doctoral education in an American institution and of-course getting to make friends from all over the globe.

Around this time last year - it was my first semester as a graduate student and as a teaching assistant - my adviser asked me to prepare a presentation about a new technology of mobile apps development and give the students an introduction and possibly run a sample program in the class. I have to admit that I was so worried about how students are going to perceive seeing a covered muslim girl lecturing about a new technology. Till then I discovered how much it was intimidating for me not to be accepted, respected or at least taken seriously just because of my look. Much of that is traced back understandably to the tragic day of 9/11, a day that shocked all humanity, an ugly day that distorted the relationship between the east and the west. I discovered when it was time for a first real interaction with the people that I was so worried wondering what cruel legacies were carried by that day? suspicion, intolerance, mistrust, or prejudice. I know this looks too much thoughts for just a presentation but it was actually the first wide direct interaction I am having with this diverse sample of the world. Thanks god the presentation went smoothly, with a weird silence during the whole lecture but a plenty of graceful looks of admiration. When I get to make friends later, I was asked, Do you have green trees over there? Do you still ride Camels? At the beginning I was taking such questions seriously trying to explain to them the correct image of how do we

live in the twenty first century and that my grandmother can use a mobile; now I still explain that but with a joke!

At the beginning, I thought that I am in the stage of “discovering the Other” while in reality I was also discovering myself. When I was trying to understand where the misconceptions in both sides are coming from I discovered that many of them are completely justified. Some muslim women are not enjoying the same level of freedom and independence that I take fore-granted. Many countries are imposing a political direction against the well of their people seizing their right of opposition or even speech. I have also found that muslims and arab image is strongly affected by the media which despite the strong polarization they are in they mostly agree on a bad distorted image of the middle eastern people. I also discovered that the world is not only Jordan and USA there are many other countries each of which has it own taste, color and texture.

During a trip organized by the International Student/ Scholar Office, I met such a wonderful diverse group of students from all tastes, color and shapes, and since I love to talk, we get to have very interesting conversations about our cultural differences, the misconceptions and stereotypes we all have about each other. Our bonds gets stronger after the trip, we arranged for many gatherings where we get to know each others more, we discovered that we are very similar, we laugh , cry and love in the same way. We discovered how labels become so fragile when humans connect on the mental and emotional level. We learned that we should not judge, we should rather communicate, we should love each other and above all respect each other differences.

I can describe my experience here being an international student as the most enriching, eye- opening and dynamic experience I'll ever have. UNCC as probably most of the universities here celebrate their diverse international student body promoting cross-cultural literacy among youth which I believe is a very important step towards restoring the values of trust in humanity above every thing else. Being a student here has empowered me to help breaking false stereotypes about muslim arabic girls which I do value among other things. Alfred Tennyson summed this up when he said “I am a part of all that I have met”. Once you are part of every one you have met, it's more probable

that you will understand them, empathized with them not judge them. My understanding and awareness of international issues have matured so fast. I know who I am more than anytime before, I also know that people from all religions, cultures , ideologies become closer if they just open a window for dialogue.

GOD BLESS ALL PEOPLE from all the world!