

INTERVIEW

with Nour Maraytta, Palestinian-German Science Bridge (PGSB) Fellow, former master student at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem and current PhD Fellow at the Jülich Center for Neutron Science – Department for Neutron Scattering and Soft Matter (JCNS-2) at Forschungszentrum Jülich.

“I WANT TO TRANSFER MY RESEARCH INTO APPLICATION”



How did you get the idea to apply for a scholarship from the Palestinian-German Science Bridge?

Nour Maraytta: I was already at the Forschungszentrum as a master student when the program started. My professor, Salman Salman at Al-Quds University, knew Dr. Karen Friese, my current supervisor at the institute, and encouraged me to apply to both the IFF Spring School and for a master thesis project here. After successfully completing both of these stays, I was granted a PhD Fellowship through the Palestinian-German Science Bridge.

What is the topic of your research?

Nour Maraytta: The main topic is magnetocaloric cooling, which is a novel, energy-efficient and environmentally friendly method for cooling that has the potential to replace the current conventional vapor compression technologies. We investigate the properties of different magnetic materials to determine whether they can be used in magnetocaloric refrigeration.

What is your academic background?

Nour Maraytta: I am a physicist. I liked this subject at school. Also, all of my sisters have studied a different discipline: math, biology, chemistry, computer science and art, so physics was something new. As tuition fees are very high in Palestine, I applied for funding and I got a grant from my own university for my bachelor and master studies. However, I could only study theoretical physics at Al-Quds University, since there was no equipment to do research at that time. I learned experimental physics in Jülich. Since there are almost no PhD programs in Palestine, everyone who wants to do research or teach in higher education has to go abroad, often to Germany, Spain, the United States or Israel.

What was your experience on arriving in Jülich?

Nour Maraytta: It is not always easy to get to know new instruments and technologies, but it is an interesting challenge. There were also many new things to get used to in my everyday life. Two colleagues from Palestine helped me a lot. At home, I am used to always being around a lot of people, since I come from a big family. In addition to my seven siblings, I have 13 nieces and nephews, and we all spend a lot of time with each other. I missed this very much. Now our big group of Palestinians in Jülich can do things together. We often meet for meals, and we travel together a lot. I have visited many German cities, such as Berlin, Dresden, Munich and Ulm, and also had the chance to travel to other countries, such as Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden. I liked Sweden the best, because the nature is so beautiful, everything is green, the food is good and the people are friendly. Travelling within Europe is so much easier than from Palestine, where you need a visa for every country and travel is very expensive.

You will finish your PhD next year. What are your future plans?

Nour Maraytta: I will try to go into industry, because I would like to work in an application-oriented environment, but I will also apply for PostDoc positions, because I think there is still a lot I can learn in this field. Then I will see what opportunities open up. I would prefer to stay in Germany, as it is difficult to find employment in Palestine. Since there are so few jobs there, most students who graduate try to get into education. But this is also challenging, because there are significantly more candidates than positions. In the long run, however, it would be good to have research centers and PhD programs in Palestine, so that students can get their PhD in their own country. Education is very important to Palestinians – everyone wants to send their children to university.

Is there anything that you especially like about the Forschungszentrum?

Nour Maraytta: The working atmosphere in the institute is very good. We are an international team with colleagues from Germany, Palestine, India, China, Morocco and other countries, and we really enjoy spending time and taking part in activities together. For example, we used to have a cooking round every Thursday, in which someone prepared a dish from his or her home country for everyone, and we had a lot of great food! Apart from that, I am very grateful to my supervisor and scientific advisor for their help and support and to my professor from my home university for his continuous advice.

The interview was conducted by Kristin Mosch.