

**Melting the Borders Between Field and Theory:
Teaching at the "Young Women Advocating Together for Change" Program**

By:

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The Sapir Academic College, located near Israel's border with the Gaza strip, has stood at the forefront of a regional conflict for the past 18 years. In addition to the continuing border violence, the region suffers from unemployment, poverty and dependency on welfare. The Young Women Advocating Together for Change program at Sapir is unique in this region of Israel through its breaking of social barriers in order to bring about social change.

This program, which I taught, together with Shaked* for three years, recruited 16 young women from underprivileged, culturally traditional backgrounds and 20 students from the Law School and School of Social Work of Sapir College. Together they explored key concepts in gender studies, legal rights, social issues and social change. During the program, the young women told their life stories and through their narratives, highlighted issues in the lives of young women in need of change. Some examples included dealing with overwhelming debt, the right to marry in Bedouin society, and others. The young women's stories became social change projects that were brought to fulfillment by the participants themselves, using legal and lobbying tools, education, media, and community engagement, as relevant.

The program brought together many different women under a joint cause, breaking the obvious barriers and differences between them: students and non-students, Bedouin women and Jewish women, liberal-thinking women and conservative-leaning women, legal backgrounds and social work backgrounds, lecturers and students, high and low

* **Shaked Arieli**, Social worker specializing in artistic means and community work for social change; activist; artist.

socioeconomic status, and others. In other words, the program's success relies on the intersectionality between countries and nationalities, between different cultures and religions, between different classes and finally, between types of knowledge (academia and field) and disciplines.

As co-advisors of this program for three years, we witnessed its impact on the lives of the participants, and through them to their wider social circles. The program's impact on the students—future lawyers and social workers—is great, deepening their understanding of the issues facing young women, especially those from underprivileged communities, enabling them to become more effective and nuanced advocates. For the non-students—the young, underprivileged women—the program had a profound impact on their own agency, instilling in them the belief in their own capacity for change, as well as their ability to affect change for themselves and their communities. They learned to focus their resistance away from blaming the system and into fighting for themselves and their rights.

Leading this program resulted in a written model that can be applied in academic institutes worldwide. In my lecture, I will elaborate on integrating non-students into academia and discuss the importance of applying knowledge from the field. I will describe the importance of advocating together, especially in matters regarding young women. Finally, I will show that despite being located in the periphery, despite the threat of violence and despite the vast political and cultural differences, the young women learned to trust each other and create a unique joint voice in the public and academic discourse, melting traditional borders of knowledge.