

TIJS Graduate Research & Travel Grants
Academic Year 2014-2015

SARA ANN WILLIAMS, GDR

sara.williams@emory.edu

Advisor: Don Seeman (GDR)

Purpose: Attend a conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on “New Trends of Research on Palestinian Christian Identity in Israel.”

I used my Tam funding to partially fund my plane ticket to Israel, where I attended an academic conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on “New Trends of Research on Palestinian Christian Identity in Israel.” The two-day conference was helpful in terms of content, as this conference was unique in its bringing together scholars from the social sciences and humanities researching Arab Christians in Israel and the West Bank. The conference allowed me to gain a better sense of the nature of the scholarship being produced in this area, which, I learned, is heavily sociological and quantitative in nature. There is much work being done around census data, geographical distributions, and survey data in order to determine the make-up and cohesiveness of Arab Christians in Israel and the relationship between these communities and the Israeli state. The need for ethnographic fieldwork is evident, in order to produce thick description to round out data interpretation. I was pleased to find this out since my dissertation project will be ethnographic in nature, looking to how Palestinian Christian identity is constructed through religious practices that respond to Israel’s state policies.

Perhaps more importantly, however, I was able to make a considerable number of contacts in the field through the conference. I met a range of scholars working on this topic. A notable resident scholar of Christian Zionism at Tantur Ecumenical Institute of Notre Dame, Robert O. Smith, offered to mentor me while I am in the field, and possibly serve on my dissertation committee. I also secured housing in the field for my projected move to Jerusalem in January of 2016 to begin my fieldwork (the Tantur Ecumenical Institute of Notre Dame). I also connected with some ecumenical faith leaders, such as Yusef Dahar of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center, in order to discern with which groups it would be most strategic to conduct fieldwork.