

for example, women are divided along lines based in events: during the conflict in Algeria, many mothers or wives of terrorists suffered ostracism or injustices without any reaction from the women's movements. The movement of mothers of the 'disappeared' is not supported by other women's movements because it is suspected of being close to certain political movements with which these women's movements do not agree.

8. Certainly. Women's groups reproduce the hierarchies and bureaucratic forms of organization within their movements. Leadership conflicts often lead to splits. Instead of having one large unified movement (even if with autonomous structures), we find ourselves with small groups of women having no real impact, and prey to endless internal divisions.

9. It's not so much the feminist movements, it is individual women who have carried out mini-revolutions in their families from the moment when they started studying and working. This has contributed to changing family relations. Yet have these relations really changed? Many women have succeeded in having a professional life, but at the expense of their family life. They have not found either the help or the necessary understanding to lead both at the same time. Only women are submitted to these painful choices. So what has changed?

10. If feminist movements are democratic, they should favor the expression of all citizens (majority and minority), and should be ready to listen to problems of women within all social groups, since language is not a barrier between women. But movements within these minorities are often monopolized by men, and women serve as a springboard only for the global project – nationalist or regional. Women don't dare assert themselves outside the group for fear of being rejected by the community.

11. This question seems to me a bit ambiguous. On the contrary, we should keep the term 'feminism' to denote women's struggle for their rights and the defense of their interests. When we talk about Arab syndicalism, socialism or liberalism, etc, no one thinks of not using it.

12. It is impossible to measure precisely. At least it has allowed us to recognize international resolutions in favor of women. This is why Algeria

ratified CEDAW (Copenhagen) in 1996. But we have to remember that eight Arab countries have not ratified this convention. Besides this, I don't really see any impact on the daily situation of women.

13. Has there been a feminist movement that was not guided by intellectuals and that succeeded? The leaders of feminist movements are often intellectuals. This new fact should contribute to increasing the research done on women's conditions and to developing knowledge of their different situations. To this effect, we should encourage the development of laboratories of research on women's issues, sociological enquiries, etc. This element of knowledge should help in gaining a better understanding of what women really want.

14. The obstacles are inherent in the societies in which women evolve and in women themselves. Our societies need democracy and freedom in order to evolve. As for women, they must overcome an age-old fear to learn to organize themselves and struggle for their rights. This is not really the case today.

15. I am not a specialist in predicting the future. The Arab feminist movements have no future outside pluralism and democracy. This is a meeting ground. The Algerian experience has proved it in the course of a decade of violence. Violence has been a powerful brake on the development of the feminist movement which really started organizing from 1989. Everything was put on hold following the events, and the women's movement drew back in its claims for women's rights. Peace and democracy are factors that would allow the movement to build itself a bit more, and to deepen its claims.

If we could change one element in this situation, it would be in the functioning of these organizations. Women's organizations must prove their rejection of the authoritarianism that is within them, and function in a democratic manner. For this to happen, one has to hope for and imagine a functioning based on the participation of the greatest number of activists, and not at the top of the hierarchy only. If organizations do not pay attention to their whole membership, then they will nurture the indifference of the majority, and become empty shells.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. That the voice of women, their concerns and ideas are now in the forefront of the public sphere; and that the hidden potentialities of women have been discovered beyond imagination, beyond what the women's movement anticipated. Another great achievement has been that women are allowed to join the public sphere, starting with education and going on to politics.

Their greatest failure is the fact that they have not been able to find a culturally relevant discourse concerning the private sphere, and how to empower women 'within' it, not 'against' it. As a key concept for describing and understanding Arab family relations and structures of power and empowerment, 'patriarchy' is not appropriate. Yet the Arab women's movement has failed to introduce another conceptual frame of analysis.

2. My position is that this is the way the Arab women's movement has been and is portrayed. But there are other histories, and Islamist women and men were always a part of the movement. If we review history we can see this. Of course there were those who saw Islam as a challenge, but I claim they were a small minority. Even Qassem Amin is now being re-read, and the Islamic component of his ideas recovered. We should avoid the ideological classifications and over-politicization of stances that have dominated this debate for so long.

3. My answer is short and affirmative: I do not see any spread of fundamentalism in the negative sense. These trends are strong but they are NOT spreading. I see a mainstream that is re-discovering the liberational potential of Islam. And I see Islam as susceptible — like any other religion or frame of reference — to being abused at times by certain trends. But the issue for me is clear: religion is about dignity and equality, and Islam is the basis of Arab culture and women's liberation.

4. I celebrate pluralism. So I ask you, where is the problem? Women have the right to choose

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which avenue of participation they would like to join, and the road should be open. On the contrary I do not think putting all women on one path is useful. We realize justice through participation, not by talking about liberation.

5. Yes, but towards more Islamization; and here I mean towards greater justice. It is a must to do proper professional *ijtihad*, and this is one part of a wider movement for religious reformation that actually seeks the understanding of the holy text anew, towards a more authentic view of the Islamic *Shari'a*, one that goes beyond inherited *fiqh* without either attacking it or ignoring its social contributions throughout history. This should aim at fostering the family, not destroying it.

6. Yes. But the question is on what basis? If the basis of our approach is Western secular feminism then we would just be spreading and fostering Western feminism. I think we should build on a mutual Islamic identity; or the common potential of the progressive role of religions in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. We need to transpose our modes of thinking beyond the polarization that has dominated for the past century, and come together to appreciate our heritage, religious identity, and different ideologies, cultures and ideas. We are still very divided from other women of the East, and the new factor that has come into the picture is that states are building bridges with secular feminism, and against Islamic voices of liberation. The sad truth is that attacking religion has become their mutual objective, at the price of a withering away of democratic concerns.

7. What has stopped the spread of this struggle is precisely an alien discourse that marginalizes religion or attacks it as only a 'patriarchal' mode of culture.

8. Without doubt the Arab women's movement should adopt more democratic structures and methods. Of course. But this can only happen if they are ready for democratic change that includes the whole society, and for cooperation with mainstream Islamic movements that are sometimes more democratic than progressive voices and circles.

9. Sometimes they have destroyed them, and this is what has deprived them of credibility in many

Only women who have been deeply wronged by these discriminatory family codes can develop the struggle for their rights.

cases. I can tell you that many Islamists are more successful in this matter, and hence are more credible even if they are not as progressive or revolutionary as the secularists. There are really many paradoxes here.

10. Here again Islam has been a unifying factor. If you put it aside you will have real problems addressing those minorities.

11. Yes.

12. More globalization, more secularization, more westernization - this is saddening. On the other hand the Islamist contributions allowed for a real silent reform on many issues, and this was a benefit

13. I cannot say, I cannot really judge.

14. The greatest obstacles to development of the Arab women's movements in my view are: political divisions; Western funding of specific agendas; and political authoritarianism.

15. Give Islam more weight, give democracy more importance, and give the silent majority of women more opportunity and attention.

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1. The Arab women's movement cannot be separated from political movements and social liberation movements. Egypt was in the lead, having started its movement towards modernization in the 19th century, earlier than any other Arab country. Then other countries followed suit. Women's development in the Gulf states, for example, started at the end of the 1920s, when the first public school for girls was established in Bahrain in 1928. However, there was no women's movement in the Gulf region until the '50s when the first women's society was established; in the '60s and '70s, women joined underground political parties in Bahrain and started their movement within their ranks.

In my view, the greatest achievement of the women's movement in all Arab countries took place in Tunisia, in 1956, when President of the Republic Habib Bourguiba granted Tunisian women the most advanced personal status law in the region. The women's movement in Tunisia was given a push forward, and women at large benefited from this law.

Their greatest failure can be linked to the failure of Arab political regimes to modernize, especially in countries where women's associations became part of the political establishment.

2. Most Arab women's movement leaders were either educated in the West, mainly in the US, France and England; or even if educated in their own countries they were influenced by Western thinking. As a consequence, they borrowed from the experience of Western women. But at the same time, Arab women never forgot their cultural background and the Islamic teachings which are part of their culture. In my opinion, borrowing from Western ideas does not harm the women's movements; on the contrary, it adds to them and enriches the experience of those who are involved in developing them, whether men or women.

3. Religious revivalism and religious reform started at the end of the 19th century when many religious scholars such as Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Mohammad Abdo and Rifa'a at-Tahtawi were exposed to Western ideas, and started questioning certain religious practices in what we consider today as a beginning of religious reform. With the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war, combined with the dictatorship of the Arab regimes, individual men and women had nowhere to go except to their own culture and roots, which in this case is Islam. Arab regimes and the West encouraged this movement. It was in the interests of the West to fight the atheists (the Soviet Union), especially in Afghanistan. To me there is no contradiction between modernity and the practice of Islamic rituals, or women wearing the *hijab*, as long as this does not keep them from attaining education and employment.

Whether or not Islam can offer a long-term basis for struggle for women's rights depends on individual Muslim countries, and the pace of development that each has reached. For example Turkey, a Muslim country, has recently passed a Personal Status law similar to any in Europe,

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whereas countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain or Yemen need to use various *hadiths* or *Qur'anic* verses to convince the people that Islam offers gender equality.

In addition, the Muslim world includes non-Arab Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. These countries have gone far in Islamic interpretation to make Islam more compatible with modernity. In the Arab world, many scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Farida Al-Banani have written books to explain that Islamic teachings include many modern elements, and do not contradict human rights. Islam can indeed offer a long-term basis for the struggle for women's rights. We must remember that the UN charter calls for gender equality, and that all Arab and Muslim countries, as members of the UN, have to abide by its agreements, including the Prevention of Violence Against Women Agreement.

4. Arab women's movements need to undertake all these activities so as to reach all groups in society. Such activities will help them develop into grass-roots organizations. Women activists should work with such groups politically to have a wider base from which to be elected to parliament and reach legislative power. Being a member of parliament is in itself an achievement, opening many doors to women leaders such as making laws that serve women and the family.

5. Indeed yes. Women have to exert more effort to achieve modern family laws. At present this varies between countries: for example Tunisia has the most advanced family law in the Arab world, while most of the Gulf states still have no family law at all, except for Kuwait, which follows the *Shari'a* and individual judges. Many conservative elements in Arab societies are fighting back to block any reforms regarding women and the codification or reform of family law.

6. I support the idea of forming strong ties and relations with different women's movements all over the world, especially those of the Muslim world. Islam covers a vast geographical area with a population of more than one billion people. Many Muslim countries have made advances in issuing progressive family laws, eg. Turkey. In Malaysia, many women's organizations, for example the Sisters in Islam Organization, have gone further, publishing books dealing with *ijtihad* and *fiqh*. Since India is a secular country,

'Arab feminism' varies in degree, not in kind, according to the pace of development in each individual country.

Muslim women there are ruled by the same civil code that governs all citizens. While Arab women's movements should look towards other Muslim countries, they also should have strong ties with Western women's movements and international human rights movements, so as to adopt laws suited to modernity.

7. Women from other classes of society are seeking equality too, especially when they face divorce without being granted any alimony or the custody of their children. They understand equality as a part of what Islam calls for. For that reason, the Arab women's movements should go back to the essence of Islam, and find those elements that call for equality and justice.

8. Women's movements are an essential part of civil society, which is considered the pillar of democracy. Through non-governmental organizations individuals learn how to practice democracy, through the election of board members, and through the daily practice of debate and transparency. It is true that many Arab women's organizations are characterized by non-accountability and authoritarianism. However, we are witnessing today an improvement in handling the affairs of NGOs in most parts of the Arab world, because of a growing individual awareness of international developments. Modern technologies such as Internet used by Arab organizations to communicate with each other have helped to spread such values.

9. Absolutely not. The women's movements have a long way to go, they need to modernize and communicate with international organizations that have similar goals and values. They need to create new programs for young people, and to attract different segments of society. In addition, they should put more effort into introducing gender equality into the curriculum of all schools to reach the new generation and change their attitudes and values.

10. Often described as a 'cultural mosaic', the Arab world contains many groups of different ethnicity, religion, and sect. Non-Arab minorities need to preserve their own culture and language. At the same time they need to learn Arabic since they are citizens of Arab states, and exposed to Arab culture. The best solution for them is to learn both languages: their 'mother tongue' and Arabic. The Kurds in Northern Iraq are bilingual, since the Kurdish language is part