be active, they would have to open up to non- Arab Islamic women's movements. This would enable women to take advantage of the latter's experiences, and to get out of the shabby situation they find themselves with regard to women in our Arab societies, and their failure to make any worthwhile achievements. In Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh and Indonesia, women have succeeded in becoming prime ministers, leaders of political parties (both loyalist and opposition), whereas until now this has not happened in any Arab country. Also, these important achievements in Iran in amending the personal status code - as I mentioned above - represents a model and experience that could be taken advantage of. There is no problem in using both Western and Eastern experiences, while taking into consideration the cultural specificities of our own societies as well as to open to recent achievements in the West.

7. It is only natural that the leaders of Arab women's movements are mostly educated, urban women from the middle to upper classes. This is mainly so because the struggle can only be carried on if it is accompanied by awareness, education and intellectual openness, and these qualities are mostly to be found among urban educated women. In the 1970s and 1980s education for girls in Arab countries began to expand, and by the 1990s the level had reached its highest point so far. The main reasons for this are the collapse of the post-independence regimes, the political isolation, and the value of women. This represents a leap above our cultural specificities, and serves to heighten the isolation of Arab women's discourse.

8. Arab women's movements are a reflection of national and cultural participation of women in the Arab world. All parties, whether loyalist or oppositionist, have leaders who are not elected and, as such, they practice power in a dictatorial way. I do not know whether it is possible for women's organization leaders to overcome the reality surrounding them and be more democratic. Certainly if they want to be a vanguard, and more effective, they should do this.

9. I am surprised at the way so many Arab women's movements adopt the notion of gender without even debating it. I think it needs a lot of debate, especially since it originated in an entirely different culture from our own, and is the result of a post-modern stage in the West, where all the values, thoughts and paradigms have fallen one by one, so that people are left in a world devoid of values and morality. This represents a leap above our cultural specificities, and serves to heighten the isolation of Arab women's discourse.

10. I don't know what the policies of Arab women's movements are with regard to minorities. I have not monitored this issue, and have no information about it. But what should these policies be? They really should not be different from those that we adopt in our countries, and what we consider as the problem, and their issues are similar among the majority and the minority, whether this is an ethnic, racial, religious or cultural consideration that minorities often suffer from isolation and discrimination. I believe that if women achieve their status and benefits in society as a whole, or if there is an amendment of the laws, then this will reflect positively on everyone.

11. As I said in the beginning, there is not one Arab, homogenous women's movement, but several movements. It is important to note that the expression 'Arab feminist movement' is different from 'Arab women's movement'. Feminism is a trend that originated in Europe (I talked about it earlier in answering Question 2), that struggles for equality between men and women, and sometimes calls for the superiority of women over men, 'feminizing the world'. Of course, not all women's movements in the Arab world agree with this; some do not believe in malefemale equality and refuse the idea from the beginning. I do not think there is an 'Arab homogeneity' and generalization will not help us in realizing achievements. It is true that the cause of Arab women is homogeneous as far as the fundamental facts, but the approach and tools of women's movements may differ between one Arab country and another.

12. From the beginning the impact of the UN Decade for Women was limited to official delegations, since it gave them the responsibility of representing Arab women, and of participating in the various conferences. The last of these, the Beijing conference, led to some studies and statistics. Today, the circle of influence has started to expand a little, and a few notions and issues are being activated, such as violence against women and reproductive health.

But I believe that we have to remain cautious, because the priorities of international organizations may differ from our priorities, and their approach to women's issues may also differ, since they originate mainly from Western societies. We should not repeat everything they say in parrot fashion, nor should we adopt everything they demand without thought. The minimum level of respect for our national and cultural specificity demands that we adopt what emerges from international organizations, so that we should adopt it only when it suits our societies and helps us improve their status, but firmly refuse it when it contradicts our values, such as the campaigns against abortion, or our rejection of religious laws that serve the system, or our rejection of political parties (both loyalist and opposition), which rule out any social guarantees or any collaboration with both sexes, because women's cause cannot be isolated from society as a whole.

If I wanted to change anything in the Arab women's movements, it would be to give the opportunity to younger generations to participate and have a role.

Work on awareness has to be conducted with both sexes, because women's cause cannot be isolated from society as a whole.
Parallel to this, are the problems of addressing poverty, ill-health, and the general education of women not in the more advantaged sections of society.

2. First, the Arab women’s movement is over a century old and has its own history which has long been in conversation with Western feminism. Second, we should not overlook the influence, in complex ways, of the Arab women’s movement on Western feminism. Western feminism developed with a gaze – a gaze on the East. For better or worse, Western feminism, in many ways, defined itself in relation to the Third World woman as “other.” As Aihwa Ong has pointed out, no category of Third World women has figured as large in the Western feminist imagination as Arab and Muslim women.

Third, few large movements of the past century can claim themselves to be purely culturally specific. We live in a global and globalizing world in which ideas as well as commodities and people travel. One has to ask why those same conservative forces who are concerned about Western influence in feminism seem unconcerned about Western influence on technology (if such a designation can be made for products that are developed all over the world). They seem to adopt the illusion that technology is innocent of culture. The assertion of cultural purity is a strategy for control over various kinds of work. It cannot be allowed to preempt constructive dialogue and engagements across state boundaries.

3. Religious fundamentalism is spreading worldwide. And world wide, it has made inroads into state power. One has only to look at the religious right in the US and in Israel. The fact that the West focuses on the rise of fundamentalism in the Arab world as if it were an exceptional situation has much to do with global politics which defines Islam globally and the Arab world in particular as the evil other. It is the engine of defining its enemy and naturalizing itself.

That said, it is important to look at the specificities of the rise of religious fundamentalism in the Arab region. Many scholars have offered plausibly reasonable reasons for the rise of religious fundamentalism: the corruption and tyranny of Arab regimes; the corrupting uses of oil wealth; the alignment with the West of many Arab regimes, discredited by significant sectors of their own population; the heavy-handed alignment of the West with Israel, even as it occupies force; the economic instability, uneven social development, marginal political freedoms. In principle, there should be room for women’s emancipation within religious frameworks. The simultaneous embrace of Christianity and feminism by many Arab women. That in itself is a worry. Many Muslim feminists have argued that Islam can and does offer women their rights and therefore religious revivalism should not threaten the Arab women’s movement. Thus far, where it has taken power in the Arab region, or where it has comprised itself into a political movement, religious revivalism has either compromised women’s emancipation or left many concerned about the constraints packaged with the liberatory. While in principle there should be room for women’s emancipation within religious frameworks, the path cut so far has proven difficult if not impossible to walk.

4. Pluralism is not only good, but it will happen regardless of our judgement. I would be worried about institutionalizing “active policing”. Women must work wherever they feel they can and want to. Who could possibly be the judge of the long term impact of the various kinds of work? It might appear to be simple acts can have far-reaching and important political consequences.

5. Family law must continue to be a high priority for the Arab women’s movement. It is the lynchpin, within the political arena, for most other legal constraints on women. Women’s lack of full citizenship is linked to the ways in which family law defines them as subordinates to their male kin; their economic inequality is similarly rationalized in terms of their familial roles (deemed subordinate); and their control by patriarchal religious institutions have over family law.

6. The Arab women’s movement is already engaged with and networking with women’s movements in the ‘East’ and ‘South’. This is important not only in the quest for alternative models and strategies for women’s rights, but also for general social change. In a globalized world with one superpower, those outside the arena of power have been given two options - align with the power center or align with the decentered. Non-alignment was once the strategy for maneuvering. A bipolar world (us versus them) is not a better world. But when power centers impose those binary choices, those marginalized from power can conceive power or creatively invent new alliances for power.

7. The Arab women’s movement is not unlike the women’s movements in most of the world which have attracted primarily women of educated classes, it is not unique in this regard. Where it differed was in countries with aggressive state-sponsored women’s federations. The UN Decade for women and its offshoot agencies (eg UNIFEM) have had an important impact on the Arab women’s movement. First it made Arab governments pay attention and, for face saving, if nothing else, claim victories on behalf of women’s rights. Second the Decade provided a critical stage of activism on behalf of women. Third, the UN Decade made it possible for various international human rights organizations to have women professionals will, de facto, change the face of power.

How the family is to be addressed in Arab societies will have a different from the way it has been addressed in Western societies by Western feminists. The specificity of that engagement is taking shape.

10. The Arab women’s movement has tried to embrace ethnic and religious differences. This continues to be a struggle for the movement and is one of monumental importance. Law stands against these solidarities as the devolution of family law to the Occupation in religious sectors in some countries often creates different legal realities for women of different religious sects. It is a challenge that must be faced.

11. Little is gained by avoiding the term feminism in the effort to avoid creating a false notion of Arab homogeneity. We use the term ‘Western feminism’ even though it is utterly the case that there are theoretical, political, and ethnic/religious differences among Western feminists. The term feminism is a strategic insertion on behalf of a cause. As long as we do not collapse all Arab women into a homogeneous category and as long as we are aware of the strategic use of all our terms (including the term ‘woman’ which is also homogenizing) - that is all we can do. Language cannot perfectly reflect our understanding of the world.

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How the family is to be addressed in Arab societies will have a different from the way it has been addressed in Western societies by Western feminists. The specificity of that engagement is taking shape.

13. The women’s movement moves not only through the efforts of self-identified feminists, but through the efforts of all women who empower themselves. The increase of Arab women professionals will, de facto, change the gender equation in Arab societies, and is therefore most welcome.