

## Forecast

Women are at the centre of this issue of *Quaderns*. At the centre of the reflection and study. At the centre of the articles and analyses. Women and the challenge of equality under the weight of tradition. Women as agents of progress and social cohesion. Women as major players in the collective processes. Women at the centre of political debate in most of the countries in transformation, such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Women as drivers of change and actors in the revolution that made the Arab Spring flourish.

Perhaps women had never before enjoyed such importance in the political debate of countries in transition. The Qatari author Amal al-Malki stated that the only good thing that the Arab Spring has given women is that it has publicly brought to light the serious problems concerning their status in the Arab World. Indeed, women have been at the centre of the debate on the social model from the failed attempt of the Ennahda party to introduce the concept of complementarity between men and women in Article 5 of the Tunisian Constitution to the Egyptian presidential campaign, in which the now President Mursi appeared all over Cairo on electoral posters alongside three women, one uncovered, another with the hijab and a third wearing the niqab, a distinctly unobvious way of asking for the female vote of any ideological affiliation.

Women's rights today in the Arab-Muslim world are the thermometer for measuring the temperature of the democratic process. The West believes that if women's rights regress in both the legislation and in everyday life, the prospects for building a pluralist society will be endangered. And this vision of the European and Western media in general is not the result of a Euro-centrism with little respect for cultural peculiarities. In the Mediterranean countries themselves, the secular political forces are even more combative in terms of the risks of regression which an Islamist social and political preponderance would involve and believe that legislation on women and their place in society is the touchstone of the quality of a democracy under construction.

This is precisely where one of the greatest dangers lies: the exploitation of women's rights by the political parties, the simplification of believing that it is only possible to fight for equality from an anti-Islamist stance, and the manipulation of linking women's equality to secularism or of confusing tradition with religion in order to impose a dogmatic

interpretation of the religious texts. Women's rights must not be the object of a partisan political struggle because women will lose out in the end. There is no religious fundament that impedes the consideration of women citizens on an equal footing with men in order to have access to education or health, to acquire property, or pass on nationality, to vote or be elected; in short, to aspire to a full civil, cultural and economic life.

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