

Story Corp Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Yara AbdelLatif

Narrator: Professor Wafaa Wali

Date: 26/09/11

Place: Narrator's office

Room P164

HUSS building

AUC New Cairo campus

College: The American University in Cairo

Prof.: Prof. Kim Fox

Date completed: 29 Sep. 11

Prof. Wafaa Wali

Prof. Wafaa Wali is a professor at The American University in Cairo. She is a teaching instructor at the department of rhetoric and composition at the university.

I chose to conduct my interview with Prof. Wafaa Wali, because I know of her interests and her ideas and opinions about matters such as the topic I have chosen for my interview, and for my questions. I have had multiple discussions with her on the topic of women, in general. And so, I wanted to listen to her opinions on women in Egypt specifically, especially after the recent revolution, and the current situation in Egypt.

26 September 2011

Person's present: Yara AbdelLatif

Prof. Wafaa Wali

Yara: Well, hello

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Hi

Yara: I'm gonna ask you a few questions, well, as a female in a changing society I'm worried about the status of women in Egypt so how do you see Egyptian women after – let's say – 20 years?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: I don't think the position of Egyptian women within 20 years is going to change unless they themselves change their perceptions about themselves. I think that as long as women think of themselves as "the weaker sex", as long as they think that they need to be subordinate to men or subordinate to, you know, to a boss or subordinate to a superpower (I mean) someone who is above them, I think this is going to stay the way it is. I think the only way women can change their lives is by changing the perceptions of themselves.

Yara: And you think the majority of women in Egypt are like that?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: I think the majority, not only of women in Egypt, I think the majority of women in the world perceive themselves to be, to different degrees of course. But we are brought up to believe that there are things we can do and things we cannot do and things, and we accept a lot of status quo, and... (Pauses)

Yara: Like traditions?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Traditions and culture, even globalization, like, even for example, the sexing up of women in the media for example. Where women are continuously throughout history reduced to a physical entity. Whether it's by... by... by covering them in the name of religion, or by, you know, undressing them in the name of MTV music...

Yara: Fashion

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Ya exactly.

So it's... It's like it's throughout. And I think that as long as we, and I think we ourselves perceive ourselves like this, the way we dress the way we take care of our bodies, I mean, we, a lot of women invest in their looks much more than they invest in other aspects of their existence. And so as long as we are, the world is telling us this is how we should view ourselves, this is how we actually view ourselves, it's going to make the status quo is going to stay the same.

I think we need to go back and consider who we are, our identities, and realize our full potential, you know. We are very powerful, I mean look for example at the process, for example, of... of... of giving birth, like the idea of giving birth is like you can create life, and we... and we can do so many things, we can create life, we can go out and work, were... were we can be independent, we don't need to be scared. We need to really go out there and realize our full potential, and I think this is the only way that things could change.

Yara: Well, people nowadays seem to be always unhappy, so what's your definition of happiness? In your own words.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Happiness is... (Pauses)

I don't know if there is anything called happy. (Laughs)

I feel its... I don't know what's happy. I think to be... to be conscious, in the present moment, is... is... is what makes us happy.

Yara: So how should people feel that? How should we bring it out in people?

Nowadays, with all that is happening.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: I think people in Egypt are really asking for too much. It has, like, I mean, as far as this revolution is concerned, as far as I'm concerned, I feel that...

(Pauses) What has happened is huge, it's major. I don't think any of us realize how major it is. We are still, and what has happened has just... just removed the icing on top of the cake, and currently, like, it's like when you have an infested wound, and you have a lot of puss, so what you've done is, you've removed the cover, now all the puss is coming out, and what is actually happening now is healthy because it's a process of cleaning up. But because of the, also there are people and there are entities that are not interested in cleaning up the wound because it doesn't serve them, so they actually create pressure and... and so, of course we're unhappy because a lot of us, some of us, went through the revolution, those who didn't go through the revolution, if they were not there themselves but were supporting are also, were like, we're all excited, and then all of a sudden nothing's happening and everyday we listen to very destructive news. But I think that it's a natural process, and I think that the revolution is not over, that actually we... we are finished with part 1 revolution, so we're going through part 2, we're actually going...

Because the army finds it very difficult to relinquish the power, they've had the power for the last 60 years, they're not willing to give it up easily, it... it will have to get very ugly before it gets any better. And I do understand this frustration as long as, but people have to see why it's happening. It's happening because there are people who are stopping us from getting places.

Yara: People as in...

Prof. Wafaa Wali: As in the military council, as in the interference of super powers or other powers in the area who don't want us because of threats.

Like, for example, Saudi Arabia would be very afraid if Egypt gets a real democratically elected government, because that would create tension in their own country were people are also wanting an equally democratic, "democratic" government, but, and so (I mean) like, just yesterday they gave women the right to vote, out of a sudden, like it's very funny how you read in the news the king gives women the right to vote, as if there is no parliament, like it's not even a country.

It's like (Dad) told me I can go out late at night, you know. (Laughs)

It's not like there is a government or there is a procedure or anything. And I feel this creates a lot of corruption, so people of Saudi Arabia, and then of course, there is Israel, and then there is the United States, and all these countries have (pauses) (I mean) interests in democracy not happening here.

Yara: Well now that we're looking forward to the elections, and wondering who our next president will be, if you were to be elected as the first female president, what would be your first action? And why?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: I would, I believe that the only way to, for sustainable improvement is education. And the first thing I would do is that I would give the teachers, school teachers, decent salaries and I would offer them a lot of training sessions about how to teach, and what to teach. I would get rid of international education in Egypt.

Yara: What do you mean?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Like all the schools, the Canadian school, the American school or at least because I think these they graduate all these kids, who are not affiliated at all with Egypt; they don't study Egyptian history, no Egyptian geography, no nothing, no Arabic. Some of them don't even do Arabic.

Specifically primary school teachers, these are the ones I would start with. Because I think this is the only way we can go forward.

Yara: So start from scratch.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Start from scratch, at the bottom. That's, I think that would be. I would do the other things but that would be on my priority list.

Yara: Education.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Yes.

Yara: Ya, I agree with that completely. I think it's a pretty big problem in Egypt.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: Yes, because then you can, if you don't have, if you have uneducated people you can easily say whatever; you know people can believe you. Look at what's happening now, if we have democracy, how can I trust democracy, like democracy in terms of everybody elects that means... And then, there are these, a lot of uneducated people, it's very dangerous. (Pauses)
So I would invest in education, definitely.

Yara: Well, if you weren't a professor at AUC, what would you be doing instead?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: I would be...

Yara: Or is this something you've always wanted to do?

Prof. Wafaa Wali: It is, no it's not, I don't know if I something I've always. But there are other things I really like to do, like... (Pauses)
I love to, one of my huge interests is to recycle existing products things that you find on the street, on the market, in the Friday market, for example, in Cairo, and re-looked them... re-looked them and re-design them so that they become usable again.

Yara: Okay, in what sense? Like what are you...

Prof. Wafaa Wali: For example, I do a lot of stuff with car tires. I bring them and I create tables with them and chairs and... and shelves. Or on plastic shoes...

Anything, like you can find and you take it and you create something completely different with it. You have a new perspective on it.

Because I believe that a lot of our, (I mean), we... we... (I mean) (Pauses)

I like the idea of reusing. Like, for example, I recycle, for example, I... I... I... I create, I... I...

When I'm cooking at home, when I'm at home I have my own garbage for... for organic food and the I take it and I take into the garden and I create a, I mix it with... with the mud and I, you know, I create a compost because then I can use it for something else.

Like I believe in, that nothing should be put to waste. And that if something, for example, I would never buy, for example, food that has a lot of packaging because that's very harmful to the environment.

So that's what I would do.

And maybe dance also. (Laughs)

Yara: You're doing both now, right? (Laughs)

Prof. Wafaa Wali: (Laughs) Ya I am, I am. But, (I mean) I would...ya... I'd do...
I mean, like teaching and everything, I love teaching but my only problem is that I (I mean) with the teaching comes with a lot of paper work. (I mean) if it's only the teaching, okay, but the paper work and the grading, someone else does, that I'm fine.
(Laughs)

Yara: Well, thank you very much.

Prof. Wafaa Wali: You're welcome.

Yara: Thank you.