
Palestinian Women

at the Core of the National Struggle

This essay by Dr. Faysal Darraj addresses theoretical and practical questions about the liberation of Palestinian women, in the light of the outstanding role played by women in the intifada.

By many criteria, Palestinian women emerge as militant fighters and mothers of generations of both militants and martyrs. Each woman is a human monument evoking pride as well as sorrow. While remaining a staunch fighter, she is equally the mother of a lad martyred before he reaches twenty, the sister of a fedai whose body is torn by enemy bullets at dawn, the daughter of yet another fedai who departed for the occupied homeland and has yet to return, the comrade of a youth who has never tasted the pleasures of childhood.

The Palestinian woman is a mixture of the splendor of dignity and the bitterness of grief. No comparison can be made between her and the traditional woman who starts life openly admitting that she is helpless. While some consider the emancipation of women as a luxury or a pastime with little significance, history has plucked the Palestinian woman from her traditional bed and inherited functions, to throw her into the furnace of the struggle for big dreams stemming from the usurped homeland, or small dreams relating to providing bread for her family, or waiting for her husband to return safely from battle.

The Palestinian woman was born into a gloomy and unjust history; she was destined to write an epic full of blood, tears and suffering. More than a century of struggle and oppression

has given the Palestinian woman the strength to withstand the martyrdom of the child she brought up on a pittance, to rebuild her shanty in the camp time after time. It has created the great woman of the intifada, a woman who, armed with a stone, walks in the martyr's funeral, visits her imprisoned son, upholds the flag of Palestine, cradles her cheeks in anguish, ploughs the land, reads the daily newspaper, kneads the dough and discusses daily matters. She knows the qualities of the kings and the presidents, together with the language of the enemy. With her traditional gown and distinct dialect, that barefooted woman looks much more beautiful than those who wear uniforms; she is richer than all the kings who have by chance obtained a handful of silver from the sand; she is wiser than all those who never speak without first mentioning their academic titles.

In the course of her life, the Palestinian woman has experienced her transformation in a number of localities: in the refugee camp, in the Palestinian resistance movement, and in the anti-occupation movement in the occupied territories. The question now is this: If we put aside the miserable period of the refugee camp, is it then possible to talk about the women under occupation and the women of the Palestinian political

