
organizations created by the resistance outside Palestine, in the same language?

While searching for an answer, we will briefly refer to a few points: Firstly, the general condition of life has pushed the Palestinian woman from her traditional position into a new one. Secondly, the Palestinian resistance in exile established a series of women's organizations, but administrative measures and overly general slogans did not invariably lead women to more advanced positions. This is aside from the fact that the bureaucracy, in accordance with its mentality, has often hindered women's initiative and impeded their progress. In this sense, the active process of both Palestinian women and men was too large for the bureaucratic limits of the existing organizations, with the exception of some attempts made by the left wing.

Due to their particularity and the varied forms of the Palestinian political organizations' struggle, the women's struggles in the occupied territories were more fruitful and thorough. This enabled women to be more obviously present in the overall national struggle and to take effective initiatives. The difference between the status of women in occupied Palestine and those in exile confronts them with a new issue: fighting for a moral and political reform in the PLO institutions in order to overcome the conditions which prevent them from undertaking their real role, and to obtain representation equal to their practical contribution to the overall national struggle.

Developing the women's status in the overall national struggle requires two forms of struggle: firstly, against the occupying enemy, uniting the struggle for the emancipation of the land and the woman; secondly, against the traditional view of the woman as weak and only suited for simple tasks and evening pastimes. This struggle is necessary because no view which is void of full respect for women will ever find the path to the homeland.

COUNTERING OCCUPATION

Before the June 1967 war, women were engaged in the establishment of charitable societies. This activity remained a social privilege connected to high social status and some liberal well-to-do circles, rather than leading to active social involvement. The meaning of working in such societies was close to what we can term «social aesthetics,» with each husband boasting of his kind wife, or the wife boasting of her famous husband.

With the June defeat, the meaning of the welfare society changed radically. Women's activities no longer remained within the limits of pretension and prestige. They became acts of resistance against occupation. Occupation itself raised a new question: If the gentle woman of welfare work was to continue her activity under occupation, she should of necessity alter her attitude to this activity - not by her will alone, but in the sense of objectively meeting the requirements of the new situation, where any social action is a rejection of occupation. If not, the welfare lady should give up her place to others who do not care about «social aesthetics» and instead concentrate on the struggle for the national cause. In this sense, occupation and resistance to it have been reformulating the structures of social action, as well as the intellectual state of the forces involved.

The consciousness which evolves in the comprehensive daily conflict between the Palestinians and Zionists affects the society as a whole, including women and their societies. Before occupation, these societies, in their traditional form, carried out a series of welfare, cultural and educational activities. Under occupation, however, the political element became the dominant factor in all women's activities. It is essential to stress that the replacement of the moral by the political was not the result of any voluntary or organizational action, but rather an objective reflection of the new situation. Based on the new situation, women began to play a significant if not leading role in the national arena.

There is no doubt that the Palestinian women's movement was formed within the same historical context as the Palestinian national movement. The two are inseparably interlinked. The trends in the Palestinian women's movement were formed within the trends and conflicts of the Palestinian national movement. Palestinian women never started their women's activities in order to afterwards join a particular political current; not did they join a particular political organization in order to later go over to the field of women's activities. They would rather make their choice and approach the political organization which expressed their interests in its daily struggle.

In this sense, the political choice of women was not only subject to class interests and general ideological attitudes, but also to their own aims as women, their quest for emancipation and open recognition that they are equal human beings capable of independent, creative activity. This is what renders the Palestinian women's movement, theoretically and perhaps also in practice, too big for the existing political organizations, because women do not aspire to an organization that speaks of women's liberation in general. Rather, they aspire to an attitude that is cognizant of the particularity of the woman's situation in society. It is this which motivates the Palestinian women's movement both within and outside the organizations simultaneously. It is in them because of unity of action and national aims. It is out of them because it does not see any correct solution for its problems in the programs and practice of these organizations. Therefore, it is no wonder that women are usually organizationally active between 18 and 25 years of age. Thereafter, their role recedes and is consequently reduced to their personal and family lives. This reduction, to whatever degree, is not solely due to the ordinary problems of marriage, family, traditions, etc. It is also due to the absence of correct and comprehensive programs dealing with the status of women.

In this connection, the researcher faces a simple or compound paradox with two aspects: First, finding a formula that satisfies the needs of women is extremely difficult; second, Palestinian women do play a leading role in the national struggle. This role is not dependent on the role of the organizations, but is essentially due to the state of occupation. It is as if this occupation, being organized, multi-faceted repression, has without any desire on its part solved a theoretical problem and created for women ideal conditions for discovering their capacities. In this way, they have proceeded from being a plaything, cook, «tender unequal half,» the mother of kids, etc., to being women confronting occupa-