

tion, deriding imprisonment, carrying arms, getting involved in underground activities, etc. Paradoxically, occupation, which is evil rather than good, has enabled women to emerge from secluded chambers into the streets of struggle and confrontation. It is no wonder that in 1976, there were more than 38 women's societies in the West Bank alone. Certainly, the role of these societies was not to struggle only for women's rights, but to preserve the unity of the society and restore its weak links.

The woman's role was seen in many fields, such as medical care, fostering orphans, fighting illiteracy, helping poor families, safeguarding traditions, assisting prisoners' families, together with militant action in the direct sense. This multi-dimensional activity played an essential role in preventing the Israeli attempts to undermine the Palestinian social and cultural structure. One particular association, the Society for the Preservation of the Family in El Bireh, which was established before the 1967 occupation and continued thereafter, should be referred to here. This society concentrated on providing opportunities for women to work, to enable them to become self-reliant. While maintaining the vestiges of the past, such societies acquired new qualities through the state of occupation. Out of their interaction, a number of progressive women's institutions have emerged since 1978, pointing to the establishment of mass organizations oriented towards a radical solution for both the national and women's questions. The first activity of these institutions was to study the situation of women factory workers.

The Women's Work Committee, founded in Ramallah in 1978, was different in both structure and ideology from the previous welfare societies. It relied on direct effectiveness rather than on formal frameworks; hence the absence of both a center and a traditional membership. It was, moreover, opposed to the concepts of center and bureaucratic organization, instead releasing the freedom of initiative in action throughout the villages, camps and factories. Thanks to the advantages of self-initiative, the membership of the women's committees multiplied and spread to different places. Moreover, the absence of a formal framework helped to avoid direct Israeli censorship. Yet the essential factor in these bodies' success lay in their realistic policies which were based on the daily needs of the people. They were not bound by central directives, but respected the attitudes and wishes of the masses. Because of a high sense of responsibility and a democratic spirit, the influence of these committees went beyond class boundaries, reaching different types and groups of people.

While the previous women's organizations proceeded from voluntarism and abstract notions, the Palestinian Women's Committees, formed in 1980, worked to involve people via their daily interests which are inseparable from their national aspirations; this lent a high degree of credibility to their slogans. It should be stressed here that the use of such methods was only possible thanks to the positive qualities of the leadership of these committees, who possessed an advanced consciousness and a high scientific and cultural level, and were in touch with the ordinary people.

These committees formulated their national and ideological aims based on real knowledge of reality. The situation of Palestinian women has clearly been affected by the differing

conditions in the occupied homeland on the one hand, and in the various places of exile on the other. While the resistance movement, with its policies and ideology, defined the status of women in pre-determined parameters, the conditions under occupation provided women with a broad scope and a greater perspective in terms of united national action. This was also due to the absence of irresponsible organizational rivalry. Conditions under occupation accentuated the fact that there was a clear battle between a militant people and an aggressive occupation.

Another essential consideration is that occupation has led to the destruction of a great portion of the original social and economic structure of the Palestinian people. Previously, agriculture was the main economic field, while industry was limited. The occupation came to destroy the Palestinian agriculture, confiscating land and crops. Rural Palestinian women were obliged to go to the cities where the Israeli factories were ready to absorb them. Women thus entered the factory as «black labor» to suffer from multi-dimensional oppression: national oppression, capitalist exploitation and racial discrimination. Today, it is possible to speak of the Palestinian woman worker. In this connection, the category of labor acquires great significance; its meaning is not reduced to the relationship between product, surplus value and employer. It is manifest in the restructuring of consciousness and of personality. This takes women away from the traditional sphere, language and standards, to throw them into an arena of significance.

Here women were obliged to unite the economic and national aspects of their struggle. Gradually they freed themselves from their narrow consciousness which focused on a few abstract notions, such as honor, chastity, etc. They advanced towards a comprehensive struggle, entitled to reformulate their personalities as militant women and experienced workers. A new stage began where political organization merges with trade union activity. Male workers no longer left their wives behind at home; they began to see them at both work and strikes, as well as in confronting oppression and exploitation. Ancient consciousness was collapsing, giving way to a new consciousness without which the intifada would not have been possible.

## RESISTANCE, EXILE AND WOMEN

Throwing water in the faces of Palestinian women, the resistance woke them from their slumber; they moved from a negative state to a situation which retained the negative factors, but with some positive modifications. When noting this awakening, we see the bright side, but it did not lead to real emancipation. It by no means enabled women to act rather than merely react. In the gap between the two levels, we see the negative side of this issue. At the beginning things looked easy. The very emergence of the resistance movement with all the battles it fought, its victories as well as its tragic failures, brought the revival of the Palestinian national identity, a very great achievement in which women share.

As we move on, the picture is less clear. Doing research on the status of women in the Palestinian national struggle means looking into the totality of the political and ideological practices through which it has been waged. Consequently, we move