

Voice of Women

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In this issue:

Palestinian women victims of Israeli brutality

Early marriage on the rise

Conference on Palestinian Women

Bouquet: A promise fulfilled after 20 years

Women and literature

Palestinian women victims of Israeli brutality

Ibrahim Muhammad, Ramallah

A survey conducted in Bethlehem, Jenin and Hebron by the Women's Research Center between November 2003 and January 2004 shows that 99% of Palestinian women have experienced Israeli brutality directly; 79% of which reported experiencing severe aggression, 6.3 % of which resulted in permanent disability.

Early marriage on the rise

Sanna' El Assi

Eighty two million women in third world countries will get married before they reach eighteen years of age. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics shows that the early marriages decreased by 18% in 2000. Unfortunately this figure has risen again during the current Intifada. Poverty, lack of education and unemployment reinforce the traditional view that the only value of a woman is as a wife and a mother.

Conference on Palestinian Women

Aziza Noufal

Last week the West Bank city of Nablus hosted the Conference on Palestinian Women. Recommendations made at the conference stressed the importance of unifying women's efforts to challenge Israel's apartheid wall, the priority of addressing the suffering of women prisoners, the need to revise the strategies of women's organizations, the need for developmental policies to take gender issues into consideration and the importance of supporting women's organizations' role in the coming elections.

Bouquet
Zulfa Shahrour

I was unable to utter a word of sympathy to a woman who had just learnt that her son is in coma after being shot by the Israeli army. He had just come back from Jordan, after the Oslo Agreements, to start a business in the West Bank. I looked into his mother's eyes, trying to understand what she was going through. I seemed to be looking at the same bitter expression I had twenty years ago in Beirut. Was it possible? Could this be the same woman?

I went back home in bewilderment. Yes, I was sure this was Amjad's aunt. I would never forget those eyes. Amjad had been in his office in Beirut when the Israeli army shelled it in 1982. Because of limited medical treatment in Beirut, he was sent to London, but the doctors there were unable to help him, and Amjad soon passed away. We worked for days together to help his family, who live in the West Bank, to prepare for his funeral when his body arrived from London. At that time the Israeli forces did not allow any members of his family to cross the borders. None of his family were allowed to participate in the funeral.

In order for someone from his family to be present at the funeral, we called his uncle who came in the early morning to Beirut from Iraq. After the funeral, Amjad's aunt had to go back to Amman. Looking at me with her sad eyes she asked me to make a promise. I was staggered. She made me promise to put flowers on Amjad's grave after forty days. I promised her, but was unable to keep my promise because I had to leave before the forty days had passed.

I went back the next day to see Amjad's aunt, who this time is grieving her son. We talked about our memories in Beirut. I confessed to her that I had not kept my promise. She looked at me with disappointment. At that moment, we heard that her son had died in the hospital. I went to the funeral, which took place in Al-Bireh because the Israeli forces refused to allow his body to be taken to his village.

After forty days, I went to the cemetery, carrying the most beautiful flowers I could find. I saw her there, alone, weeping as she laid flowers on the grave. I felt as if she was expecting me. After twenty years, I am finally keeping my promise, I said.

Women and literature
Dunia Ismael

The relationship between Palestinian women and literature has been fraught with challenges. Despite the early participation of Palestinian women in literature, such as May Zeyadeh who was born in Nazareth in 1886, and Um Koltoum Odeh who was born 1892, Palestinian women have not received the media coverage they deserve, for reasons such as cultural restrictions.

A Palestinian encyclopedia lists 50 Palestinian women out of 819 of famous writers. If we divide this figure over the number of years since the birth of May Zeyadeh, we arrive at a dismal result. A national project about Palestinian women writers is an idea deserving serious attention in order to bring to light women's achievements. Despite the presence of many women's organizations, creativity is usually not one of their priorities. This has not happened by chance but because these organizations lack women with creative gifts. They tend to concentrate their efforts on activists rather on those with creative talents. Can our women's organizations participate seriously in building an intellectual movement without addressing the question of creativity?
