

THE ECOLOGY OF FEAR

Nejat Al-Juboury
University of Baghdad
College of Education for Women

ABSTRACT

This study reveals the impact of human excessive interference with other humans' and non-humans' worlds, dominating and exploiting their lives, environment and resources. This interference has caused several ecological problems, among which is the ecology of fear.

ملخص البحث

تكشف الدراسة الموسومة (بيئية الخوف) عن اثر التدخل المفرط للكائن البشري في عوالم الكائنات البشرية والغير البشرية الأخرى وذلك بالسيطرة على حياتها واستغلالها وكذلك البيئة والموارد مما يسبب مشاكل بيئية عدة من ضمنها بيئية الخوف .

Preface

Fear is a powerful force in the world, a force whose impact may far surpass the direct effect of what is feared. 'The ecology of fear' is a term used by biologists to describe far-reaching effects of predators on the behaviour of their prey as many aspects of animals' lives are a response to the fear of predation.

This ecology of fear has also transformed the Iraqi life. Fear is a bad feeling – bad enough for Iraqis in general and women in particular to change their way of life in order to avoid that fear. As Iraqis are anticipating a new era of democracy and freedom, waves of intimidation have arisen to crush their hopes. Violent oppression of men and women is spreading across Iraq, a weapon of mass mental and physical destruction. Three years after the invasion of Iraq, women remain no better off than under the rule of the previous regime as post-war insecurity has proved to

leave them at risk of violence, curtail their freedoms, scare them to death, and force them to live miserably in violent environments.

Yellowstone National Park:

Looking through some information on the internet to support this study the researcher's attention was attracted by a report by ACFNEWSOURCE on June 20, 2006. A summary of this report is given below.

The disappearance of gray wolves from Yellowstone National Park has caused far-greater ecological change than scientists previously realized. Scientists noticed that willow, aspen, and cottonwood trees in the northern part of Yellowstone National Park were dying out and no new ones were growing up past the seedling stage. It was in 1920s that the last wolves were killed in the park and in the same year these trees stopped growing, being doomed by dense herds of elk that clustered along the park's river and browsed the trees so heavily that no young saplings survived. It is known then that wolves eat elk which in turn eat plants like aspen trees.

As wolves were reintroduced to the park in the late 90s, aspen trees and others started regenerating and the proliferation of these and other plants are attracting more birds, bears, and beaver. When wolves roam the parks, elk and other animals experience fear. They have drastically changed their behaviour in response to the threat of the wolf attack and are much more scattered. They stay in well-covered and wooded areas where they can hide or run away from wolves. Without wolves, animals were free to roam every corner of the park, grazing leaves, trees and seedlings until practically no vegetation remains causing the trees to disappear.

Ripple and Beschta, two forest resources professors at Oregon University (2004) call this phenomenon an example of fear ecology in which animals' fear of predators plays a significant role in the environment, and they find that the presence of the wolves is controlling the entire ecosystem in Yellowstone National Park. Take away that fear, Trail (2004) argues and behaviours that were assumed to be genetically determined may simply disappeared. Reintroduce that fear, and old patterns quickly return even if it is after a long time.

What is interesting in this report is the similarity between the situation in Yellowstone National Park and the situation in Iraq, concerning this phenomenon of fear ecology, where the human interference in both situations caused destruction of the natural community and environment.

The report indicates implicitly that the natural environment system in Yellowstone National Park was working well and the natural community was functioning properly to sustain a healthy web of life. However, all this became disrupted causing death to aspen, cottonwood and willow trees because of human intervention which was obviously the main cause of the disruption.

It is clear, then, that present human interference with the non-human world causes ecological problems which are excessive, but the large question which the researcher would like to raise is what about human excessive interference with other humans, not only dominating and exploiting their life, environment, and resources, but also abusing them and torturing them.

Politics of Fear:

Trail (2004) wrote that on Sept. 11, 2001, a particular sort of fear was reintroduced to an American population, when hijacked planes destroyed the World Trade Center towers and struck the Pentagon causing death to almost 3,000 people. He adds that it was a horrible moment in the history, and the enduring tragedy of those deaths continues to reverberate through the lives of all of the Americans. It has changed everything and America is never the same. Trail (ibid) calls this 'politics of fear' which led to retaliation against countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. However, Trail seems to forget that Iraqis have been going through this one day agony for years now. There is no way to describe how much deterioration has struck the lives of millions of Iraqis, or how the air, water and soil upon which human life and planetary life depend have been destroyed. However this is only part of the issue for above these crises, come violence and insecurity which curtail Iraqis' freedoms, Bush once falsely promised to secure.

In Iraq, for almost four decades, things were under control and the big wolf and his close followers were dominating the entire system. When he was ousted, his regime collapsed, and Baghdad fell, the new predators and their fans failed to establish effective authority and security. There has been a complete breakdown of law and order and the whole community system deteriorated. A recent study by John Hopkins research group reports that 665,000 civilians, more than half of whom are women and children have been killed since the fall of Baghdad, that is 2.5% of the population. Is the death of the trees at Yellowstone Park somehow identical to the death of people in Iraq? Aren't both deaths due to human's interference? Men, women, and children in Iraq are left at risk of violence, and they have drastically changed their way of life in response to the threat of the new predators but for how long? Would it take us seventy years like the trees at Yellowstone National Park to thrive and survive?

Our concern here is actually not the death of a number of trees in the northern part of a park in Western America but the killing, kidnapping and raping of a whole nation. It was said once that killing one person is an unforgiven crime but the killing of a nation is an issue that requires a lot of consideration.

Women's fear :

This study will shed some light on this phenomenon of fear ecology and concentrate on women's fear of the new predators: US soldiers, Iraqi policemen, the militia, and gangs, who roam freely, kidnapping, killing and raping until women become almost invisible and have become shut-ins in their own homes. Historian, Marjorie Lasky has described this situation in Iraq in "Iraqi Women under Siege" a 2006 report for Codepink, an antiwar women's organization. Before the war, she points

out, many educated women participated fully in the work force and in public life. Now, many of them rarely go out, as they fear kidnap and rape; they are terrified of getting caught in the cross-fire between Americans and gunmen; they are frightened by sectarian reprisals; and they are scared of religious militants who intimidate them if they are not "properly covered." Parents are frightened to send their daughters to school and university. In brief, she concludes, women are forced to live behind closed doors only to emerge, concealed behind scarves, hidden behind husbands or fathers, (cited in 'The Hidden War on Women in Iraq,' 2006).

The following are some of what Iraqi women are facing in the new era of "democracy and freedom."

▪ **Threats:**

Iraqis face threats to their lives and security every day which force them, especially women and children, to disappear from public life. The increasing militarization of Iraq has resulted in the widespread availability of weapons. This raises serious concerns in relation to women's safety. Violence, including gender-based violence is not a by-product of militarization but one of its central features. In addition, the number of radical groups has increased in Iraq. Many of them have issued threats against women not observing the Islamic dress (hijab). Wearing a pair of trousers or Western clothing is an act of defiance punishable by death. Heather Coyne of the United States Institute for Peace (cited in Feminist Daily News Wire, Nov 16, 2004) reports that she knows of many cases where female leaders were threatened with death for wearing Western clothing. According to the organization "Women for Women" Manal Omar said, "Many professional women have stopped working. They are being forced to stay home, pointing to the murder of Aquila al-

Hashimi, a female member in the Iraq Governing Council in Sep., 2003, and to the murder of a female news reporter, Atwar Behjet, 2006, as well as the assassination attempt against the Nisreen Burwari, a member in the Iraqi cabinet, (cited in Feminist Daily News Wire, Nov. 16, 2004). In July, 2006, two women legislators were targets of political violence. Taiseer Mashhadani, a lawmaker and several of her bodyguards were abducted at a checkpoint in Baghdad. She was kept as a hostage for two months, whereas the second lawmaker Liqa Yaseen and her driver escaped a kidnapping attempt though eight of her bodyguards were captured according to Los Angeles Times (Feminist Daily News Wire, July 3, 2006).

There are, however, some people who seem to be really content with what is happening. "These incidents prove what we have been saying for so long," said some Iraqi religious extremists and leaders, "that it is the Islamic duty of women to stay in their homes, looking after their children and husbands rather than searching for work especially with the current lack of security in the country." (Rosen, July 13, 2006). Megan Cornish argues that Iraqi women who are 60-65 percent of the Iraqi population face double jeopardy as victims of occupation and targets of fundamentalism. He adds "But at the same time Iraqi women are showing incredible bravery in facing the enemy and are reaching out for support." (March 3, 2005)

Not only professional women are targets of threat for many reports indicate that activists and organizations are being threatened. According to the organization "Women for Women," threat and lack of security forced half of their workers to stay at home; the other half was evacuated to Jordan, (Amnesty International Women, March 31, 2004). A Baghdad-based Woman Freedom Organization (WFO) has warned that incidents of threat against women have increased in frequency since 2003 US-led

invasion and occupation of Iraq. "The extent to which women have lost their rights in Iraq is shocking," said WFO President Senar Muhmmmad (cited in "Rise in violence against Women," March 13, 2006)

▪ **Kidnapping:**

Another worrying trend according to the previous study by WFO is the large number of kidnappings of women, many of whom reported being sexually abused or tortured. While such incidences were largely unknown during Saddam Hussein regime, more than 2,000 women have been kidnapped in Iraq since 2003, the report noted.

Money has become more important than lives, and kidnapping women, being easy targets because of their weakness, is a quicker way to get a good ransom. This is certainly another example of change of behaviour and destruction of morality among gangs after the fall of Baghdad.

Like women everywhere, Iraqi women have been vulnerable to kidnap and probably rape. But since the invasion of the country the reported incidence of kidnapping has accelerated markedly, despite the fact that very few Iraqi women are willing to report such incidents either to Iraqi officials or to occupation forces fearing to bring dishonour upon their families or be vulnerable to honour killing in which male relatives murder them in order to restore family's honour as the stigma is frequently attached to the victims instead of the perpetrators.

Human Rights Watch released a report in July 2003 entitled "Climate of Fear" stating that chaos, violence and bloodletting have descended in Iraq, matters have only become worse. After the invasion, local gangs began roaming Baghdad, snatching girls and women from the street.

▪ **Rape and mutilation:**

The chaos of war has also led to a rash of rapes of women. As recently as June 2006, Mayada Zhaair, spokeswoman for Women Rights Association

reported, "We've observed an increase in the number of women being sexually abused and raped in the past four months especially in the capital. One of the horrific stories was about a nine-year old Saba who was abducted from the stairs of the building where she lives, taken to an abandoned building nearby and raped.

Although rape is now considered a war crime by the International Criminal Court, immunity to prosecution was granted to US soldiers in Iraq who still view women as the spoils of war. The latest revealed crime took place in Mahmudiya, a town 20 miles south of Baghdad in March 2006. A group of five American soldiers raped and murdered a young Iraqi girl aged 15, and killed her three family members in their home. According to the Washington Post, former Pfc. Steven D. Green and four other unnamed members of his regiment planned the attack over drinks after seeing the girl, Abeer Qasim Hamza, near the checkpoint where they worked. (Feminist Daily News Wire, July 5, 2006). The crime was first attributed to insurgents, who later in June captured two members of that platoon and beheaded them according to the Post as a revenge for Abeer's tragedy.

Surely, these crimes against Iraqi women are not the acts of few bad apples, as suggested by George Bush and his lackey Tony Blair. All the evidence now points to the facts that they approved of these violent acts. So far these heinous crimes against Iraqi civilians proved to be ineffective and the resistance continues to grow.

▪ **Trafficking for sexual exploitation:**

The change in human behaviour goes so far that girls and women have become cheap commodity to be traded in post-Saddam Iraq. The Organization of Women Freedom in Iraq knows of cases where virgin girls have been sold to neighbouring countries for \$200 and non-virgin for \$100. These women are sold as sex workers mainly to the illicit

markets of the Gulf States, Yemen, Syria, Jordan. Victims usually discovered their fate only after they have been lured outside the country by false promises.

"They told my family that I was very beautiful and they were sure I could be a famous model outside Iraq," said one of them, who was deceived by traffickers into going to Kuwait. "My brothers and father died in 2003 and we needed money desperately, my mother agreed that I should go. But I discovered that everything was a lie, and I was forced to have sexual relations with men,"(cited in Rise in violence against women March 13, 2006).

▪ **Detention and sexual humiliation in prison:**

What is worse, Iraqi women are arrested, detained, abused and tortured not because of anything they have done, but to force their close relatives to collaborate with the invasion army and to inform against the resistance. (Ghali Hassan, May 6, 2005). An unknown number of Iraqi women are being taken hostages by US forces for political reasons, because they were relatives of Baathist leaders or because the occupying forces thought they could use them as bargaining chips to force male relatives to inform on insurgents or give themselves up. These detainees are not accused of any crimes, and experts say their detention violates the Geneva Conventions and other international laws as it happened with the wife and daughter of the former Vice Chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Council, Izzat-Duri who were arrested by the US forces.

According to Human Rights Watch report, the secrecy surrounding female detention nevertheless "resulted from a collusion of the families and the occupying forces." Families feared social stigma; the occupying forces feared condemnation by human rights groups and anger from

Iraqis who saw such treatment of women by foreigners as a special act of violation, (cited in "The Hidden War on Women in Iraq" July 13, 2006)

The British Guardian reported that one female prisoner managed to smuggle a note out of Abu Ghraib. She stated that American guards were raping the female detainees held in the prison and that some of them were now pregnant. In desperation, she urged the Iraqi resistance fighters to bomb the jail in order to spare the women further shame. Professor Huda Shaker, a political scientist at Baghdad University told the Guardian that women in Abu Ghraib have been sexually abused and raped. She identified one woman, in particular, who was raped by an American military policeman, became pregnant and later disappeared (ibid).

Journalists have been forbidden from talking to female detainees at Abu Ghraib, reported Luke Hardin of the Guardian. But the secrete photos and videos most of which remain under wraps by the Pentagon show American soldiers having sex with a female Iraqi prisoner. Additional photos have made their way to the web sites of Afterdowningstreet.org., and Salon.com. Member of the Congress who viewed the full range of pictures and videotapes seemed genuinely shaken and sickened by what they saw. According to Taguba's report (reported in Ghali Hassan , 2004) innocent Iraq women at Abu Ghraib prison have been abused , raped and forced to strip naked by sick US soldiers at gunpoint. It is now known that Rumsfeld authorized physical coercion and sexual humiliation in Iraqi prisons.

Conclusion:

Violence against women is a 'cancer' eating a way at the core of every society, in every country of the world, as Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan said while launching a new campaign to tackle this problem (March 2004). She adds that "violence against women is not

normal, legal nor acceptable and should never be tolerated or justified. It must be stopped."

Vandana Shiva (1989), on the other hand, suggests that the only path to survival and liberation for women, as well as men and nature is the ecological path of harmony, sustainability and diversity. To this suggestion we may add that the only way out of the chaos and the climate of fear in Iraq is through the direct power of the real people of Iraq-the progressive, secular masses. What is needed is a secular constitution based on fully equality between women and men, as well as the complete separation of religion from state.

One last question is "Do we need to reintroduce wolves to the scene to rectify abuses just as it happened in Yellowstone International Park?" There is certainly no military solution to the situation in Iraq and therefore the best way to end fear and violence against Iraqis is to end the military and economic occupation of Iraq. "War cannot end war," Wendell Berry argues in his essay "Thoughts in the Presence of Fear" "What leads to peace is not violence but peaceableness, which is not passivity, but an active state of being." He urges people to follow the examples of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and other peaceable leaders. There is no need to reintroduce wolves in this country. There are courageous patriotic Iraqis who can heal hearts and mend souls.

References

"American Ex-Soldier Accused of Rape, Murder in Iraq," Feminist Daily News Wire, July 5, 2006, online.

ACFNEWSOURCE on June 20, 2006.

Amnesty International Women, March 31, 2004.

Beschta, a forest resources professor at Oregon University (2004).

Cornish, Megan, March 3, 2005.

Feminist Daily News Wire, July 3, 2006.

Feminist Daily News Wire, July 5, 2006.

Heather Coyne, cited in "Despite Attack and Threats, Iraqi Women Push for Rights," Feminist Daily News Wire, Nov. 16, 2004, online.

Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General (March 2004).

Marjorie Lasky, "Iraqi Women Under Siege" 2006 check.

Pepper Trail, "The ecology and politics of fear," HighCountryNews.org, Writers on the Range, Nov.22, 2004, online.

Ripple, a forest resources professor at Oregon University (2004).

Rise in violence against women March 13, 2006.

Ruth Rosen, 'The Hidden War on Women in Iraq,' July 13, 2006.online.

Shiva, Vandana (1989) Staying Alive, Women, Ecology and Development. Zed Books, Bath.

"Two Iraqi Women Legislators Targeted by Kidnappers," Feminist Daily News Wire, July 3, 2006.

Wendell Berry, "Thoughts in the Presence of fear" OrionOnline.org.