

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



- Iraqi Women Under Occupation (Ghali Hassan) – p2 -
- How the US Erase Women's Rights in Iraq (Ghali Hassan) – p10-
- Rights Group: Iraqi Women Worse Off Under Occupation (30 March 2006) – p 14 –
- Crime puts Iraqi women under house arrest (11 Oct 2003) – p 15 –
- What's happening to Iraqi women under occupation? (19 June 2004) – p 16 –
- What's happening to Iraqi women under occupation? (19 June 2007) – p 19 –
- The Hand over of Sovereignty (22 Dec 2004) - p 24 –
- Violence against women in Iraq under US Occupation (14 March 2006) – p 25 -
- Women of the new Iraq (17 Aug 2005) - p 27 –
- A woman's place is in the struggle: Iraqi women worse off under US-led occupation – p 29 –
- Occupation Is Not (Women's) Liberation Part I - Confronting 'Imperial Feminism' and Building a Feminist Anti-War Movement (24 March 2005) – p 30 –
- Occupation Is Not (Women's) Liberation Part II
Drawing the lines between imperialism and U.S. patriarchy - the need for feminist intervention in the anti-war movement (24 March 2005) – p 40 –
- What the US occupation has meant for Iraqi women (27 Feb 2005) – p 46 –
- Killing democracy in Iraq (January 2005) – p 52 –
- Iraq: Women's rights pushed back (23 Oct 2005) – p 56 –
- Why the War is Sexist (And Why We Can't Ignore Gender Anymore) (13 March 2006) – p 58 –
- An answer to "Rise of Extremism, Islamic Law Threaten Iraqi Women" (01 April 2005) – p 68 –
- Iraqi Women's Bodies Are Battlefields for War Vendettas (19 Dec 2006) - p 74 –
- The height of humiliation (22 June 2006) – p 75 –
- '50,000 Iraqi refugees' forced into prostitution (24 June 2007) – p 83 –

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

- In Iraq, It's Hard Being a Woman (06 Dec 2006) - p 84 –
 - Women forced to give up their jobs, marriages (30 May 2007) – p 86 –
 - Women Resist Return to Sectarian Laws (25 June 2007) – p 89 –
 - The Hidden War on Women in Iraq (13 June 2006) – p 92 -
 - Iraqi Women May Lose Basic Rights Under New Constitution (23 July 2005) – p 98 -
 - For the Women of Iraq, the War is Just Beginning (08 June 2006) – p 101 –
 - United States is No Help to Iraqi Women (2006) - p 103 -
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Iraqi Women Under Occupation

By Ghali Hassan

"Respect for women... can triumph in the Middle East and beyond!" President George Bush at the UN, September 2002.

Under the US Occupation, the situation of Iraqi women has continued to deteriorate. In addition to torture and sexual violence perpetuated by U.S. Occupation forces, a great number of Iraqi women and girls are kept locked up in their homes by a very real fear of abduction and criminal abuse. Since the invasion of Iraq, Iraqi women have been denied their human right, including the right to health, education and employment.

Prior to the 1991 U.S. war and the 13 years of the genocidal sanctions, Iraqi women enjoyed unquestionable quality rights to education and health. Iraqi women had the most progressive human rights in the region and Iraqi women were the first Arab women to hold high positions in academia, law, medicine and government. Before the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, Iraqi women made up 40 per cent of the public-sector work force. Men and women received equal pay for work, education and health care were free at all levels. In the 1980s, a government program to eradicate illiteracy among Iraqi women was exceedingly successful, and women have traditionally enjoyed freedoms not found in other Arab and Muslim countries.

In addition, Iraq's Constitution was the most advanced in the Middle East, if not the Muslim World. Women rights are enshrined in the Constitution, which was dissolved (together with Iraqi Police and Security) by the U.S. Occupation and replaced by a U.S.-crafted "Interim Constitution", produced without women's representation, which deprives Iraqi women of their rights and dignity. In today's Iraq, crimes and abuse against women were back to the levels before independence from colonial Britain 1958. The crime of rape was capital offence under Iraq's Constitution.

Since the beginning of the U.S. Occupation, there has been a dramatic increase in sexual assaults and violations of women's rights by U.S. forces in Iraq. Many women have been taken hostages tortured, and sexually abused. The sexual abuse, rape and torture against Iraqi women is not confined only to

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Western media-loved Abu Ghraib prison, but is "happening all across Iraq", said Amal Kadhim Swadi, an Iraqi lawyers representing women detainees at Abu Ghraib. "Sexualized violence and abuse committed by U.S. troops goes far beyond a few isolated cases", she added.

Crimes of sexual violence, and torture by U.S. forces against Iraqi men, women and children were kept secret from the public until Seymour Hersh of the New Yorker magazine published photographs alongside extracts from the damning report of General Antonio Taguba. The U.S. administration blamed the crimes on a few black sheep. Of course it is not true. Orders come from the top of U.S. military and civilian leaderships. Unfortunately there has been no public outrage in the U.S. or in Europe to condemn these appalling practices against Iraqi women. Is it because of the European-American "shared values"?

There is credible evidence that the highest echelons of the Pentagon and the civilian Bush administration proved the brutality against the Iraqi people. According to 'The Torture Papers', edited by Karen Greenberg, director of the centre on law and security at the New York University School of Law, the U.S. government is guilty of a "systematic decision to alter the use of methods of coercion and torture that lay outside of accepted and legal norms". "It is ironic that a person such as [Lynndie England, who pleaded guilty], with little education, no authority, and zero training as a prison guard, becomes the poster child for our depravity, while the authors of the American policy toward Iraqi detainees remain virtually untouched by the scandal", reported Paul Vitello of Newsday. The U.S. Justice Department essentially immunised military and intelligence officials from liability for physical torture. "In fact, some officials who either knew of the abuse or should have known about it have been retained or promoted", reported the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on April 30, 2005. Systematic torture and sexual abuse were used to interrogate prisoners in U.S-run prisons in Afghanistan and at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and elsewhere.

Several documents released on 07 March 2005 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) show 13 cases of rape and abuse of female detainees. The documents revealed that no action was taken against any soldier or civilian official as a result. "We have to start to ask the question of whether there is a whole layer of abuse out there that we are not seeing because the evidence of abuse has been covered up", said ACLU staff attorney Jameel Jaffer. The documents also provide further evidence that U.S. troops have destroyed evidence of abuse and torture in order to avoid a repetition of last year's Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal.

Aidan Delgado, a 23-year-old U.S. Army reservist with the 320th Military Police Company told Bob Herbert of the New York Times recently, that he "had witnessed an Army sergeant lashed a group of children with a steel Humvee antenna, and a Marine corporal planted a vicious kick in the chest of a kid about 6 years old". After he was deployed to Abu Ghraib Prison, Mr. Delgado told Herbert: "The violence [in Abu Ghraib] was sickening, some inmates were beaten nearly to death". In one of the

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



many detainees' protests at Abu Ghraib, the "Army authorized lethal force. Four [unarmed] detainees were shot to death", said Delgado.

An eyewitness female detainee at Abu Ghraib, who identified herself as 'Noor', told Al-Jazeera that 'U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison raped women and, in many occasions, forced them to strip naked in public'. She admitted seeing 'many female detainees got pregnant'. Iraqi lawyer Iman Khamas, of International Occupation Watch Centre, said; "One former detainee had recounted the alleged rape of her cell mate in Abu Ghraib." "[The detainee] had been raped 17 times in one day", said Khamas.

Professor Huda Shaker Al-Nuaimi, of Baghdad University Political Science Department, told Luke Harding of the Guardian on 12 May 2004, that; 'U.S. soldiers in Iraq have raped, sexually humiliated and abused several Iraqi female detainees in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison'. Al-Nuaimi told Harding that she knows of 'Noor's' case and other Iraqi females that were arrested, taken to Abu Ghraib prison and raped by the US Military Police. 'Iraqi women here are afraid and shy of talking about such subjects', she added. Crimes of rape were very rare before the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. Rape is shameful crimes, and was introduced to the Muslim World by Western colonialists as a tool of coercion and intimidation.

The U.S. Army report on Iraqi prisoners abuse by Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba (the Taguba Report) confirmed these accounts, including 'Noor's' account and said that U.S. guards sexually abused female detainees at Abu Ghraib. The report found "numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses" constituting "systematic and illegal abuse of [Iraqi] detainees" at Abu Ghraib.

In addition to sexual violence and physical torture, a new comprehensive report documents the use of psychological torture on Iraqi men, women and children by U.S. forces released on May 01, 2005 by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), a British independent organisation. The report shows that "psychological torture has been at the centre of treatment and interrogation of detainees [in Iraq and elsewhere]". The most inhumane and damaging "[t]echniques of psychological torture used have included sensory deprivation, isolation, sleep deprivation, forced nudity, the use of military working dogs to instil fear, cultural and sexual humiliation, mock executions, and the threat of violence or death toward detainees or their loved ones", reveals the report.

Moreover, Iraqi women and their children are being taken hostages by U.S. forces and used as 'bargaining chips'. On 11 April 2005, the Guardian reported, that U.S. forces were accused of violating international law by taking Iraqi women hostages to force their male relatives to surrender. After taking the women (mother and daughter) from their home in Baghdad, U.S. soldiers left a note on the gate: "Be a man Muhammad Mukhlif and give yourself up and then we will release your sisters. Otherwise they will spend a long time in detention". One wonders who is the one to "be a man", U.S. soldiers who are abusing defenceless women or Mr. Muhammad, who is only defending his country against foreign invaders?

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Iraqi women are arrested, detained, abused and tortured not because of anything they have done, but to force their close relatives (spouses, sons and brothers) to collaborate with the Occupation and to inform against the Resistance. Contrary to the Geneva Conventions, which stipulate that no one can "be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed". The practices, which have been condemned by the UN and human rights organisations, are widely used by the Israeli Army against Palestinian men, women and children in occupied Palestine.

The Italian journalist, Giuliana Sgrena, of the Italian daily *il Manifesto*, reported that, as usual U.S. Occupation forces raided the home of Mithal Al-Hassan, a 55 years old engineer, and arrested both her husband and son. "The soldiers later ransacked the apartment and stole their saving. Denounced as part of a vendetta, Mithal was condemned without trial to eighty days of horror in the company of other women prisoners who, like her, were subjected to abuse and torture. She has since spotted her tormentors on the internet".

In another interview, Mithal added; "After that, they took me to a detention centre [near Baghdad International Airport]. There, I heard a young woman crying out from her cell, telling an American soldier to leave her alone. She said, 'I am a Muslim woman'. Her voice was high-pitched and shaky. Her husband, who was in a cell down the hall, called out, 'She is my wife. She has nothing to do with this'. He hit the bars of his cell with his fists until he fainted. The Americans poured water over his face and made him wake up. When her screams became louder, the soldiers played music over the speakers. Finally, they took her to another room. I couldn't hear anything more", Ms. Mithal told Tara McKelvey of *American Prospect*. The courage and clarity of Mithal substantiate the ongoing U.S. brutality against the Iraqi women.

Nicole Choueiry, of Amnesty International, said: "I do not think it is the first time. It is against international law to take civilians and use them as bargaining chips". U.S. officials do not admit to any female inmates, but evidence shows that women imprisoned in U.S-run prisons including Abu Ghraib and were subjected to abuses including evidence of sexual misconduct and psychological torture against women.

"Overall, 90 women have been held in various detention facilities in Iraq since August 2003", Barry Johnson, a public-affairs officer for detainee operations with the U.S. told McKelvey. "More women may be in captivity", he added, "[U.S. Army] units can capture and keep them up to 14 days". In addition, "approximately 60 children, or 'juveniles', are being held", noted Tara McKelvey.

There were nearly 625 women prisoners in Al-Rusafah and 750 women prisoners in Al-Kazimiyah alone, including girls of twelve and women in their sixties. Besides, Iman Kamas head of the Occupation Watch Centre affirms that there are five unknown U.S-run prisons in Iraq apart from the well known ten, which include Abu-Ghraib, Al-Kazimiyah, and Al-Rusafah prisons in Baghdad and Um-Qasir and Al-Nasiriyah prisons. The number of innocent Iraqi prisoners and detainees are

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



increasing every day, together with dramatic increase in the abuse, torture and rape of Iraqi men, women and children.

As usual, the brutality of U.S. soldiers against the Iraqi people continues despite the fanfare of "sovereignty" and "democracy". According to Amnesty International, there are new reports of torture carried out by U.S. soldiers and the new U.S-trained Iraqi security forces, or the 'Occupation dogs' as Iraqis call them, shifting away the abuses from the U.S. soldiers and onto Iraqi police officers and soldiers.

"The characteristics of colonial war are usually arrogance on the part of the occupiers, who believe that they belong to a superior race (more civilised, more advanced), are contemptuous of the colonised and sometimes refuse to admit that the colonised are even human", wrote Ramonet, editor of the French monthly, *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Reports from Iraq show that racism by U.S. soldiers fuel their violence against the Iraqi people. It is just the Western mainstream media complicity in the crimes prevents reporting them. It should be borne in mind that, Western mainstream media is the second front of the war on Iraq.

Western mainstream media, led by the Washington Post, The New York Times, Christian Science Monitors and CNN in the U.S. and the BBC in Britain, not only failing to honestly report the horrific crimes against Iraqi women, but also continues to publish false stories depicting the rape crimes as "hoax" or "conspiracies" which led many people in the West to accept torture as an established policy. With hundreds of newspapers subscribing to these "News Services", the distortions become replicated and amplified throughout the U.S. and the world.

Moreover, stories of cultural differences were deliberately distorted to cloud the crimes of U.S. soldiers committed against defenceless Iraqi women and girls. Western mainstream media, American in particular, is full of misleading stories such as; "Arab-Muslim patriarchy" culture with its "honour killings" is worse than rape". Although it is very rare and unheard of in Iraq, "honour killings" is amplified and used to justify the abuse and rape of Iraqi women and girls by U.S. soldiers. The media provides 'a diversion and an attempt to blame the victims by finding the locus of the problem in the victim', to use Ward Churchill analysis. In other words, the mainstream media close ranks with the U.S. government and deliberately shifting the blame on the victims with increasing sophistication.

The new wave of so-called "true stories" of "honour killings" has been proven to be fraudulent. The trends of dehumanising the 'others' are aimed at a receptive (Western) audience, who shares the perpetrators frame of reference, to exploit an overarching climate of fear and prejudice, and in the process encourage more racism and Islamophobia. For example, "Burned Alive" and "Forbidden Love", to mention just recent two, were proved to be fabricated lies and removed from sale.

Unfortunately, the damage has already been done to an already victimised Muslim community. The

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



sad thing is that the perpetrators have been rewarded handsomely. They were not only escaped criminal libels; they became celebrities within the anti-Muslim publishing industry in the West.

Meanwhile, violent crimes against women are increasing in the Western World and hardly published in mainstream media. "It should be not forgotten that in America, not in the Muslim world, between 40 per cent and 60 per cent of women killed, are killed by their husbands and boyfriends, but such murders of course are no longer even called 'passion' crimes, much less 'honour' crimes", wrote Professor Joseph Mossad of Columbia University. "For European women aged 16-44 violence in the home is the primary cause of injury and death, more lethal than road accidents and cancer.... Between 25%-50% of women are victims of this violence", wrote Mr. Ignacio Ramonet.

It is this Islamophobic trait of imperial American-Western culture and its anti-Muslim racism that propels the abuse and torture of innocent Iraqi men, women and children in U.S-run prisons in Iraq. The obsession of Western society with sex and sexual exploitation of women as sex objects, further substantiate the crimes of torture and sexual violence against women in Iraq.

We know now that "Abu Ghraib was only the tip of the iceberg", said Reed Brody, special counsel for the U.S-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), because Abu Ghraib is not the only prison in Iraq, and there are hundreds more. The "crimes at Abu Ghraib are part of a larger pattern of abuses against Muslim detainees around the world", added Mr. Brody.

The number of prisoners in Iraq today is far greater than that under the former regime of Saddam. The level of sexual abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners and detainees by the former regime was just a fraction in today's Iraq. Prior to 2003, Western human rights organisations were very vocal and continued to monitor and report the situation in Iraq under the former regime. Iraq was portrayed as a pariah state. But since the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, they follow the U.S. orders and stop their human rights work.

When asked about investigating U.S. crimes against Iraqi civilians, Hania Mufti, an investigator with HRW told Phillip Adams of Australia's Radio National on Tuesday 26 April 2005, that: "The Agency is not concerned to investigate U.S. crime against the Iraqi people, because U.S. crimes against Iraqis are happening now in front of our eyes. The Agency is more concerned to investigate crimes committed by the previous regime which took place in 1990s so we can pursue the 'genocide' charges". Her allegations against officials of the previous regime are supported by "evidence" collected from refugees in Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and Britain. The refugees were enticed to make allegations. She also admitted that U.S. forces in Iraq and Iraqi expatriates are assisting the agency in making a case of genocide against the former Iraqi officials.

The most disturbing and misleading allegations of Hania Mufti's is; "The majority of Iraqis welcomed the invasion". Of course this is a falsehood. Most Iraqis (92-98 per cent) opposed the invasion and

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



occupation of their country. The immediate uprising of Iraqi Resistance against the Occupation was a guide. According to Iraqi pollster Saadoun Al-Dulaimi of the Iraqi Institute of Strategic Studies, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis (+85%), favours the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. A U.S.-sponsored poll in May 2004 shows that 92 per cent of Iraqis viewed the invaders as "occupiers" rather than "liberators", 85 per cent wanted them to leave immediately, and only 2 per cent (2%) of Iraqis viewed the U.S. as "liberators". The Washington Post survey revealed that; "Public opinion polls show 80 per cent [of Iraqis] want the Americans out of their country. In the election campaign, one common theme among candidates was the withdrawal of occupying forces". The Iraqi people have rejected this U.S-imposed form of colonial dictatorship.

The miseries of the Iraqi people have more than doubled in the last two years, and Iraqis viewed the Occupation as the cause of their miseries. In addition to the crimes of sexual abuse, torture and rape committed by U.S. soldiers against Iraqi women, all other aspects of Iraqi women's rights have also deteriorated. Women health and women education have fallen significantly. Unemployment, prostitution and malnutrition, have increased dramatically, and are now widespread among Iraqi women today.

A report by Women for Women International reveals that 57 per cent of Iraqi women and their families do not have adequate healthcare, and that the maternal mortality rate have tripled when compare to the period between 1989 to 2002. Iraq's infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. The health care services and the education system are on the brink of total collapse. Iraq had one of the highest standards of living in the Middle East' prior to U.S. war and sanctions. Under U.S. Occupation at least 200 children are dying every day. They are dying from malnutrition, a lack of clean water and a lack of medical equipment and drugs to cure easily treatable diseases. This traumatic situation has significant psychological effects on the health and welfare of the children's mothers. Electricity blackout is as long as 15 hours a day, much longer than that of pre-war level.

As a result of the U.S. dismantling of the Iraqi state, many women lost their jobs. Unemployment among Iraqi women is more than 70 per cent and rising. The dismantling of the Iraqi Security and Police led to increase in violence and crimes against women. Women are no longer leaving their homes unaccompanied by relatives. The Bush administration's promotion of religious fundamentalism and sectarianism mean the worst for Iraqi women rights. U.S. foreign policy preys on religious fundamentalism.

Iraqi women have also suffered great loss in lives. U.S. aerial bombing and destruction caused the death of great numbers of women and children. In November 2004, the reputable British medical journal, the Lancet, reported that from March 2003 to October 2004, U.S. forces have killed more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians. The number of Iraqis killed is increasing daily. The Lancet authors acknowledge that most of the victims were innocent women and children killed by U.S. bombing of population centres.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



To increase the atrocity, the U.S. provides its soldiers with "self-immunity" from prosecution making it very easy for them to kill Iraqis with institutionalised impunity, as if Iraqis were not human beings. In addition, evidence shows that the U.S-British forces use banned weapons such as napalm and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which contaminated and polluted Iraq's environment, and caused health hazards.

Doctors in Iraq have reported a significant increase in deformities among newborn babies that could be due to radiation passed through mothers following U.S. wars of 1991-2003. 'After studying family history of couples with deformed babies, they concluded that radiation and pollution [caused by 'depleted' uranium dust, DU] were the main causes of the deformity', Dr Lamia'a Amran, a paediatrician at the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) hospital in Baghdad, told IRIN News. "Since 1991 the number of children born with birth deformities has quadrupled", said Dr Janan Hassan, who runs a children clinic in Basra in southern Iraq. If DU is the cause of the cancers, which is most likely, the crisis could become infinitely worse for women and children in Iraq.

"The depleted uranium left by the U.S. bombing campaign has turned Iraq into a cancer-infested country. For hundreds of years to come, the effects of the uranium will continue to wreak havoc on Iraq and its surrounding areas", said Iraqi artist and author of 'Baghdad Diaries', Nuha Al-Radi before she died of leukaemia on August 13, 2004.

The U.S-Britain used thousands of tonnes of DU in their wars on Iraq and over a wide range of areas. It took three to five years for the cancers to begin manifesting after the first Gulf crisis. Iraqi women and their newborn babies expecting bleak future as a result of the U.S-Britain use of WMD.

The pretexts for the war were proved to be just lies. Iraq had no WMD and Iraq had no relations with terrorism. The war on Iraq was an illegal act of aggression, designed to increase the threat of terrorism and violence, in order to exert control. The continuing Occupation of Iraq is to rob Iraq of its oil resources, and enhance U.S. imperialist doctrine.

So, as news of the appalling miseries of Iraqi women has piled up, where are Western feminists? Aren't women rights a universal demand? Are Western feminists allowing George Bush to steal their rhetoric to occupy Iraq and torture Iraqi women? Where is this international women solidarity? The setting up of an international war crimes tribunal to investigate and prosecute those who committed these crimes against the Iraqi people should be the aim of the world community. It will enhance human rights and democracy worldwide.

George Bush "colonial feminism" and his use of women status in the Middle East is merely to denigrate Islam and Islamic culture, and serving U.S. imperial doctrine. The best way to redress U.S. crimes against Iraqi women and end the suffering is the immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. This will allow Iraq to progress toward full sovereignty and national independence.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The Occupation has had both immediate and long-term negative implications for the safety of Iraqi women and for their participation in post-war life in Iraq. The end of the Occupation will stop the chain reactions of violence, and may allow the victim's wounds to heal.

An edited version of this article appears on globalresearch Ghali Hassan lives in Perth, Western Australia.

<http://www.countercurrents.org/iraq-hassan090505.htm>

How the US Erase Women's Rights in Iraq

Ghali Hassan, www.globalresearch.ca

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GlobalResearch.ca

Prior to the arrival of U.S. forces, Iraqi women were free to go wherever they wish and wear whatever they like. The 1970 Iraqi constitution, gave Iraqi women equity and liberty unmatched in the Muslim World. Since the U.S. invasion, Iraqi women's rights have fallen to the lowest level in Iraq's history. Under the new U.S.-crafted constitution, which will be put to referendum on the 15 October while the bloodbath mounts each day, women's rights will be oppressed and the role of women in Iraqi society will be curtailed and relegated to the caring for "children and the elderly".

Immediately after the invasion, the U.S. embarked on cultivating friendships with religious groups and clerics. The aim was the complete destruction of nationalist movements, including women's rights movements, and replacing them with expatriate religious fanatics and criminals piggybacked from Iran, the U.S. and Britain. In the mean time the U.S. moved to liquidate any Iraqi opposition or dissent to the Occupation.

The creation of paramilitary death squads – from the SCIRI and Al- Da'wa militias – tied to the current puppet government and Iran have been terrorising Iraq's secular communities and assassinating large number of prominent Iraqi politicians and professionals (see [Robert Dreyfuss - Death Squads and Diplomacy](#)). By using one group against the other, the US is dancing to the ongoing violence and the prospect of civil strife, while its corporations are siphoning off Iraqi resources and assets.

During his stint in Baghdad as the U.S. Proconsul, L. Paul Bremer often appeared with pro-Occupation women groups to foster the myth that the U.S is "liberating Muslim women", while at the same time signing laws that were detrimental to women's rights. Like George Bush and Tony Blair, Paul Bremer is no feminist, but he used feminism's rhetoric to enforce Western imperialism. "Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the idea of feminism essentially functioned to morally justify

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



the attack[s] on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe [and America]", wrote Leila Ahmad, professor of women's studies and an expert on gender at Harvard University. Hence, feminism serves as the "handmaid of colonialism", added Ahmed.

Since March 2003, Iraqi women have been brutally attacked, kidnapped and intimidated from participating in Iraqi society. The generation-old equality and liberty laws have been, replaced by Middle Ages laws that strip women of their rights and put them in the same oppressive life as women in Afghanistan, the nation which the U.S. invaded to "liberate" its oppressed women. The 1970 Iraqi constitution is not only the most progressive constitution in the Muslim World, but also the most equal. Iraqis were mentioned only as "citizens", and Iraqi women's rights were specifically protected.

In December 2003, the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) – constituted mostly of the current puppet government – approved resolution 137, which will replace Iraq's 1959 Personal Status Laws with religious law to be administered by conservative religious clerics from different religious groups with different interpretation of Islamic laws. The laws could affect women's rights to education, employment, and freedom of movement, divorce, children custody and inheritance. The 55-member Constitutional Committee, who allegedly drafted – under the American radar – the new constitution, is only 17 per cent women. Like the January elections, the drafting of the constitution was undemocratic and lack public participation. Amid the escalation of violence, Iraqis are asked to vote on a constitution they do not understand. Many Iraqis believe "the new constitution weakens the state and strengthens religion within the government", which can be used to suppress people's rights and freedom in general and women's rights in particular. Its main purpose is to legitimise the Occupation and the puppet government. Iraqis, women in particular do not need a constitution; they need peace and security.

Under previous governments, "Iraqi women have enjoyed some of the most modern legal protections in the Muslim world, under a civil code that prohibits marriage below the age of 18, arbitrary divorce and male favouritism in child custody and property inheritance disputes", as accurately described by Pamela Constable of the *Washington Post*. "Saddam did not touch those rights, but the U.S.-appointed IGC have voted to wipe them out", added Pamela Constable. It is noteworthy that due to women's participation in the Iraqi society, modern Iraq was an important cultural powerhouse before the invasion. It exported education, including arts and sciences to the rest of the Arab World.

Sadly, no where Iraqi women have been more betrayed than among women groups in the Middle East. When Karen Hughes, the Undersecretary of State and Bush's personal confidant went to friendly Middle East dictatorships to sale the war and lecture them on women's rights. Her trip was dominated by friendly meetings with audiences filled with U.S.-friendly women and groups who received U.S. funding and consisted mostly of exchange students. Shameful as it was, these Arab women had no concern for the suffering of their sisters in Iraq, and remain silent despite the oppression they endure themselves under despotic regimes.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Only among Turkish women the opposition to the war has been apparent even before the occupation. When Hughes went to Turkey, Turkish women turned the table around and lectured her on women's rights and democracy. According to the *Washington Post*, Fatma Nevin Vargun, a Turkish women's rights activist told Hughes; "War makes the rights of women completely erased and poverty comes after war -- and women pay the price". Vargun has also denounced the arrest of Cindy Sheehan, the America who protested against the war at an antiwar protest.

Today, many Iraqi women have been abused, tortured and raped by U.S. forces. A large number of Iraqi women are still in U.S.-run prisons without charge and without access to lawyer. Two prominent Iraqi female scientists, Dr. Rihab Rashid Taha, a biologist and Dr. Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, a microbiologist are still imprisoned without charge since the invasion. Former UN chief inspectors – David Kay and Hans Blix – have questioned the continued detention of Iraqi scientists, including the two female scientists, by US forces.

The continued detention of Iraqi scientists without charge and incommunicado appears to violate international law, said the human rights group, Amnesty International. "Women have been subjected to sexual threats by members of the U.S.-led forces and some women detained by U.S. forces have been sexually abused, possibly raped", added Amnesty International in its February 2005 report. Given Amnesty International interest in the treatment of prisoners and prison conditions, one would expect Amnesty International to be more vocal than just paying lip service.

"There are no lawyers allowed for the detainees and no information is given about the reason or the evidence surrounding the detentions, Amal Kadhum Swadi, a prominent lawyer in Baghdad, told the WTI in Istanbul, Turkey. "In the process, Iraqi women are being raped. One woman was bleeding for three months and the raping continued. There was no health service. The media does not mention these facts or the fact that all of Iraq has become a prison", added Swadi. Indeed, there are more prisons in Iraq today than at any time in Iraq's history.

Indeed, Western mainstream media, Western propagandists, and women movements are deliberately concentrating on the role of Islam in the new constitution, ignoring the Occupation as the main violator of Iraqi women's rights. Iraq has been a secular society for generations. Iraqi women are more literal with their Islam than any of the surrounding dictatorships who alleged to live according to Islamic laws. Since the U.S. Occupation, Iraqi women started to cover their heads which is continuously promoted in Western media as the face of oppressed Iraqi women. On the contrary, the percentage of Iraqi women in traditional wear was miniscule before the invasion. The brutality of the U.S. Occupation and the violent nature of the US military created the right conditions for the current violence against women.

All evidence shows that violence has increased dramatically since the invasion, because it served the U.S. main objective. "Several [Iraqi] politicians [in the puppet government] have actually suggested

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



that the U.S. is involved in the sectarian killings in Iraq; encouraging sectarian strife with the aim of weakening the Iraqi nation and destabilizing the country, which would justify extending its military presence there", reported *Al-Jazeera* on 04 October 2005.

U.S.-instigated violence and the miserable living conditions created by the Occupation have forced Iraqi women to lock themselves in their homes. And even in their homes, Iraqi women are less safe today than before the invasion. U.S. forces and their collaborators continue to raid, Iraqi homes days and nights, accompanied by terror and human rights abuses of Iraqi women and their families. Iraqi women are arrested, detained, abused and tortured not because of anything they have done, but to force their close relatives (spouses, sons and brothers) to collaborate with the Occupation and inform against the Resistance fighting to defend their people and Iraq's independence.

The U.S. is not the "guardian" of human rights, as many Americans still living with this fallacy; the U.S. has become the opposite, a creator of misery and injustice. The American people should be made aware of the path their nation is taking, and the crimes it is committing in their name against innocent people around the world.

What ever Americans think of their nation and the crimes their government committing against innocent people, "for the people of Iraq and the rest of the world, [the torture and abuses of human rights] will serve as a reminder of America's unyielding sadism against those who have the misfortune of living under its occupation", wrote Dr. Joseph Massad of Columbia University in New York. "The [Occupation] proves that the content of the word[s] 'freedom' [and 'liberty'] that American politicians and propagandists want to impose on the rest of the world [are] nothing more and nothing less than America's violent domination, racism, torture, sexual humiliation, and the rest of it", added Dr. Massad. The U.S. Occupation of Iraq proves that freedom and liberty were not the words the United States was founded upon.

The only hope left for Iraqis to gain their freedom and liberty is the immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops, and their collaborators from Iraq. The forming of an Iraqi government based on national unity and independence should provide laws that are legitimate and that guarantee human rights for all Iraqis.

Global Research Contributing Ghali Hassan lives in Perth, Western Australia.

www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=HAS20051007&articleId=1

054

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Rights Group: Iraqi Women Worse Off Under Occupation

by Sanjay Suri

March 30, 2006

Women were far better off under former Iraq dictator Saddam Hussein, a women's group has found after an extensive survey in Iraq.

"Under the previous dictator regime, the basic rights for women were enshrined in the constitution," Houzan Mahmoud from the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq told IPS in an interview. The group is a sister organization of MADRE, an international women's rights group.

Under Saddam, she said, "women could go out to work, university, and get married or divorced in civil courts. But at the moment women have lost almost all their rights and are being pushed back into the corner of their house."

The recent constitution, which was written under the U.S. government's supervision, is "very backward and anti-women," Mahmoud said. "They make Islam the source for lawmaking, and the main official religion of the country. This in itself means Islamic Sharia law, and according to this, women will be considered second-class citizens and will have no power in deciding over their lives."

The whole of Iraqi society has been subjected to "chaos and brutalization," she said. "Security is absent, all basic services, and above all the protection for women's rights is in no way on the agenda of any of the political parties who have been hand-picked by the U.S. administration in the installed so-called parliament."

MADRE is calling for the deployment of a United Nations-led peacekeeping force and an immediate end to the U.S. occupation. As the crisis in Iraq intensifies, the group says women and their families in Iraq face an urgent need for security, functional government, and the provision of basic services within a human rights framework.

Over three years of occupation, the situation is becoming more dangerous and bleak with the presence of the occupying forces, and "the more violence and terrorism is in function in Iraq, the more women will fall victims of such climate," she said.

"The rape, abduction, abuse in prisons by prison guards, and killing of women is widespread," she said. "The lack of security and proper protection for women is a major issue and no one, neither the occupying forces nor the local police of the puppet regime, is doing anything about it."

But the position of women does vary within Iraq, she said. "In the Kurdish part, the situation of women is slightly better because Iraqi Kurdistan was out of the hands of the Ba'ath regime from 1991,

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



so it was not part of the U.S. military attacks in 2003. But the attitude toward women is not progressive there."

Beyond any dangers from the political situation, "a lot of so-called honor killings are still taking place, and the Kurdish authorities are not doing much to prevent it from happening."

But the south is directly under daily military occupation, "and the presence of various Islamic armed militias who are terrorizing women has made their situation worse," Mahmoud said. "Also, the so-called parliament is divided on the bases of religious sects and ethnic backgrounds, so the majority of Shi'ites who are in power are institutionalizing women's oppression and are systematically forcing Islamification on Iraq."

Women are 60 percent of the population of Iraq, but they are not being consulted on any political issues and are being deprived of this right, she said.

The presence of a few women should not mislead people on the situation of women, she said. "The U.S. administration has handpicked a few women and imposed them on people in the so-called parliament," she said. "These women are very unknown to Iraqi women. Most of them belong to the reactionary, right-wing parties in power and they follow their agenda, which is discriminatory against women."

Women would first like to see "an end to the military occupation which has created chaos and destruction of Iraqi society and also resulted in the daily mass killing of ordinary Iraqis."

Women particularly would "want to see security restored so at least they can go out freely without being attacked, kidnapped, or having acid thrown on their face," Mahmoud said. "In addition, women want equality, freedom, and their rights to be recognized in the constitution, and above all to be treated as equal human beings."

(Inter Press Service)

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Crime puts Iraqi women under house arrest

Suzanne Goldenberg in Baghdad finds the city's female population crushed by the lawlessness under US occupation

Saturday October 11, 2003

The Guardian

Amina is putting her beauty salon up for sale. She has recovered from the episode last June when armed men burst in and robbed her clients of cash and jewellery, and she has learned to live with the gunfights that erupt with regularity at the coffee shop next door.

But within the space of a month, she says her teenage apprentice narrowly escaped abduction, a customer was held at gunpoint in another kidnapping attempt, and one of her regulars was dragged away by the hair and gang raped.

Such is the pace of events in post-war Baghdad, where the US occupation has ushered in an explosive rise in crime which has wreaked havoc on once genteel areas, and driven women indoors.

Amid the ordinary lawlessness of a city of 5 million with a barely functioning police force, there are particular horrors for women. The last few months have seen the emergence of organised crime, trafficking in drugs and stolen cars - and, the evidence suggests, in women as well.

At the same time, Baghdad remains a city consumed by thoughts of revenge, against Ba'athists at first and now increasingly against rival gangs. Many scores are settled by kidnapping and rape.

The breakdown of law and order began with the departure of Saddam Hussein's regime, and with it the brutal system of control that had made Baghdad a relatively safe city for its size.

In Amina's neighbourhood, the previously respectable coffee shop next door expanded and hired four prostitutes to sit in the back. The gangs soon started coming round, sometimes with their friends in the police, and Amina's customers left.

"No one is going to come here any more," she says. "There is no security, no safety. All my customers come to talk to me and ask me to move."

Last week she reached breaking point. Armed thugs from a gang involved in prostitution tried to kidnap the apprentice on her first day at work, and beat up Amina's husband and two other men who managed to save the girl.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



A day later, on September 29, Nada, a prostitute who has become one of Amina's regulars, was not so lucky. Four armed men stormed into the coffee shop where she works, and dragged her by the hair to a waiting car.

Abducted

Nada says they stopped the car once, to grab another woman wearing a headscarf. They punched her in the face, and shoved her in the car. They drove the women to the riverside north of Baghdad and raped them.

Nada believes her attackers wanted to punish her because she intervened to save a woman friend from a gang. Other women have been raped to avenge wrongs committed by men of the same clan, or singled out for their own associations with the regime. Some have been abducted and sold into prostitution, in a traffic where the price of a woman is about £60, according to the police. Still others were punished for offences against Iraq's code of behaviour for women.

But Nada adds: "Do you think these gangs only kidnap girls like me? No, it's any girl in the street. It's not because of revenge, or because I do the work I do. It's because they can do anything they want."

For Asma, an engineer in her twenties, the attack was utterly random. She was abducted on May 18 from a crowded street in a suburb of Baghdad where she was shopping with her mother, younger sister, and an adult male cousin.

A pickup truck was parked on the kerb, and six men were investigating car trouble. "Suddenly something flashed before my eyes, and we were surrounded. They opened fire all around us," her mother says.

Asma was bundled inside, where two men pushed her head to her knees, and drove for several hours to a farmhouse on the edge of Baghdad, where she was repeatedly raped. It is unclear why she was targeted, but she was admonished for wearing trousers and for failing to cover her hair. The next day she was encased in hijab - the traditional headscarf - and dropped off near her parents' home. She has barely spoken since, and sits at home playing cards with her mother.

But at least she is alive. In the emergency room of Baghdad's al-Kindi hospital, a forlorn notice begs for information about a schoolgirl who disappeared from her home in May. Another seeks news of a woman of 33 who disappeared from her home in central Baghdad in July.

Fears of a similar fate have driven Baghdad's female population indoors. When schools reopened on October 4, classrooms were half empty, with girls kept home by parents forced to choose between education and safety.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Under US occupation, working women have re-ordered their lives, wearing hijab for the first time, or travelling with male relatives. Some barely venture out at all.

"There are criminals everywhere," says one, Wesen Emmanuel. "They terrorise us, and there is sexual harassment." In the six months since the war, she has been out with her friends only once. A dentist, she has given up on travelling by public bus, and has hired a driver to take her to her clinic some 20 miles from her home.

"I am scared all the time, and I am giving the driver all of my salary," she says.

Another, Rafel Daniel, says she has stopped driving her own car, and asks her parents to chauffeur her on her errands. "I'm under house arrest," she says.

All of the women recount stories of abduction - a great horror in a society like Iraq's, where a family's reputation is measured by the perceived virtue of its women. A woman suspected of transgressing social codes suffers extreme consequences for bringing shame on her family. Such codes also apply if she has been raped. She may even be murdered by her family to wipe out the stain on their reputation.

"We know of a lot of cases against women," says Nidal Husseini, a nurse at Baghdad's forensic institute. "When a girl is kidnapped and raped and returned to her family, of course the family will take her to a special doctor. The majority of doctors - without a test - will tell her family she is not a virgin, so the family will kill the girl because of the shame. Of course, they will bring the body to us."

Honour

The institute investigated 50 suspicious deaths of women last month, victims of rape as well as "honour killings", a fact which belies police claims that some measure of safety has been restored.

The authorities are reluctant to acknowledge a problem. The police force, widely viewed as incompetent and corrupt, is overwhelmed, and other officials show little inclination to sympathy.

At the forensic institute itself, where women are examined if they file a complaint, Abdul Razak al-Obeidi, the deputy director, says: "This is a classical story."

"All women speak this story. They do not tell the truth."

At his desk, Yasser al-Yassery, who is in studying to be a forensic anthropologist, says: "Maybe it is self-inflicted. A woman causes herself trauma and says, 'Someone raped me.' In our work we don't believe any story, because some women lie."

Mr Obeidi corrects him: "Most women are liars."

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

But Heydar Jaffer al-Taie knows a different story. Since last May, he has been making the rounds of the morgues every week, looking for his younger sister, Beda, 17.

"I know what kind of sister I had," he says. "We have a good reputation."

A serious-looking girl with large green eyes, she disappeared on her way to school. Mr Taie and his brothers have travelled to hospitals across the country, handed out hundreds of leaflets, and offered to pay criminals to bring her back, but there has been no trace of Beda.

"It's as if everyone was blind that day. No one saw anything. I can't find a single witness. I think they are afraid to talk. This has destroyed us."

• Some of the women's names in this story have been changed

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1060813,00.html>

Haifa Zangana:

What's happening to Iraqi women under occupation?

Iraq Tribunal – Berlin – 19/6/04

14 months after the US-led forces occupied Iraq, most Iraqis feel unsafe in their country. Women and children are in particular at risk. Violence against women is widespread.

Iraqi women make up 55% of the population.

Lack of Security -- In many ways:

The danger of being too close to occupying forces patrols in the streets, road side mines and bombs, random killing by scared American soldiers. The resistance.

Kidnapping: kidnapping for profit, revenge, sell to neighbouring countries, prostitution.

When asked about reports about women being kidnapped and violated representative of occupation forces in Baghdad told the New York Times in Sept last year "we don't do women". According to Robert Fisk of the independent in April 2003: "Abductions of men as well as women were at the rate of 20 a day and may now be as high as 100 a day"

Killing: Killing of women and children. US warplanes are running about 150 flights a day inside Iraq to conduct combat operations, according to Gen T Michael Moseley the vice chief of staff for the air

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



force (1/4/04 to A.P). 2000 pound precision – guided bombs used in Iraq. The air force had tested dropping 80 smaller 500-pound guided bombs in a single pass.

In April, Over 700 Iraqis were killed in Falluja town; half of them were women and children. Air force F-16s and navy F-14 fighters interchangeably delivered strikes In Falluja Sadr city, Najaf and Karbala Hospitals were closed and ambulances were shot at. The poorest of the poor in Sadr city were hit by tanks fire and helicopter gun ships... Basra and Imara under British control witnessed shooting and fighting. (Please see the latest report published by Amnesty international on 15/5/04 title "killing of civilians in Basra and Ammara").

The massacre in Al Qieem. On May 23rd. An American air strike had killed 40 Iraqis celebrating a wedding in al qaim town near the Syrian border, among them were 6 women guests and children. Brigadier general Kimmit, American, spokesman said : " Bad people have parties too". He said there was no sign of wedding presents! (Notice the lack of understanding for different cultures and traditions).

OF refuse to count killed Iraqi civilians: Paul Bremer said we don't count Civilians. Civilians killed until now according to Iraqi body count are 11,000.

The killing of every man means a family has been left without a bread winner.

Unemployment

72% of Iraqis working in public sector are women. In the absence of an Iraqi government unemployment among women is at highest level. Ministry of information as an e.g.

Tazkia (letter of recommendation) is needed to be employed. Lack of security prevents many women of going to work.

Electricity and clean water

Only 50 percent of the population have fresh water compared with 60 % before "liberation. Some people have no option but to drink water from rivers. Tigris water is mixed with sewage and chemicals. My sister who lives in Baghdad's suburb has no water. Women manage many water treatment plants in Iraq, lack of personal security proved a major obstacle to water delivery. Al twaitha nuclear plant was looted immediately after the war. Containers with all kind of radiation were used by people to drink water. Yellow cake of chemicals was thrown in the river. UN scientists tried to investigate the level of radiation but American forces denied them access to the area. Doctors in nearby hospitals reported high increase of various child illnesses related to radiation.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

Electricity is still intermittent. It is less than what it used to be before the invasion. Electricity is needed for water treatment, lights, air conditions...etc. I've Called Baghdad recently they were without Electricity for the third day running. Children were fainting in the summer heat in schools with no electricity. Locals contribute money to the private supplier to supply schools with electricity during exams time at least.

Drugs are sold openly in the streets.

Socially: prostitution has become widespread as a result of increasing poverty among women. (Women search rubbish in civic centres in Baghdad). Although abortion has long being illegal, a number of backstreet abortion clinics have opened in the post Saddam era. (My visit to Um Mohammed, the midwife).

Environment Pollution DU cluster bombs:

The temperature in Iraq now over 40 degree. Hot, dusty, stagnant, and unbearable.

2003 surveys and available data indicate that Iraq is the most mine-affected country in the world.. The risk of mine related injury is the highest among men and children, women will be left with extra responsibility of care for male members of the family.

The use of weapons contain DU by the OF during both 91 and 2003 invasion has resulted in thousands of newly disabled persons in Iraq.800 tons of munitions containing DU used by us forces in 1991. Cancer rates and disabilities among children significantly increased. Miscarriages and pregnancy complications increased especially in the south of Iraq. Tanks and vehicles hit by DU Penetrators were left in streets a year after the end of the war. Newly wed Iraqi women don't want to have babies for the fear of having deformed one. All data related to research on effect of DU in Iraq was burned immediately after the war.

Politically

Women issues are used as a propaganda card. Taking part in the political process is very limited. It has been designed as cosmetic rather than real change. Only 3 women were nominated to the interim Iraqi Governing council in July 2003. Women were not included in either the nine-member rotating presidential council or the committee working on constitutional reform. Majority of Iraqi women don't trust political parties .all political parties are run by men. Women working for the OF are targeted by the resistance. In the Iraqi Gov after the 30th June there are 6 women ministers among 33.

Economy and Privatization

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

The CPA is in full control of Iraqi resources. Oil in particular... "The CPA does not provide any other public data on sales of Iraqi oil, such as volume or price information" – Iraq has been offered for sale and long term binding agreements. Paul Bremer issued all kind of laws to make sure that no future Iraqi G is going to have the power to change that.

Rights of women workers and farmers are ignored. Subsidies to farmers are going to be cancelled to encourage "Iraqi farmers to compete with private investors" as claimed by deputy minister Swasan Sharif.

Women prisoners

The Red Cross estimates there are between 10,000-15,000 prisoners. The oldest prisoner 75, the youngest 11. None of them has been charged. American led forces conduct daily raids. Arresting men and women. Women are detained in most cases as hostages. For all these prisoners there have been only 30 prisoners. There are no exact figures of how many women prisoners are in Iraq. The rape of a woman stigmatizes her whole family. We have already heard of women committing suicide after release from prison. Rumsfeld spoke about photos of soldiers having sex with women prisoners. What does he mean?

The torture of prisoners by American and British soldiers leave us horrified to think what is happening to women prisoners. *During my last visit to Baghdad in Jan this year, I saw women queuing for hours at the gates of Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad begging for news of their loved ones. It brought back bad memories. In the seventies, under the Ba'th regime, my mother had to wait in the same place desperate to hear if I was held inside.*

Haifa Zangana, London,

<http://www.iraktribunal.de/hearing190604/zangana.htm>

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The Hand over of Sovereignty

12/22/04 - Iraqi women were long the most liberated in the Middle East. Occupation has confined them to their homes

Wednesday, December 22 2004 @ 08:32 AM PST

Haifa Zangana

Wednesday December 22, 2004 - The Guardian

The US state department has launched a \$10m "Iraqi women's democracy initiative" to train Iraqi women in the skills and practices of democratic life ahead of the forthcoming elections. Paula Dobriansky, US undersecretary of state for global affairs, declared: "We will give Iraqi women the tools, information and experience they need to run for office and lobby for fair treatment." The fact that the money will go mainly to organisations embedded with the US administration, such as the Independent Women's Forum (IWF) founded by Dick Cheney's wife Lynn, was, of course, not mentioned.

Of all the blunders by the US administration in Iraq, the greatest is its failure to understand Iraqi people, women in particular. The main misconception is to perceive Iraqi women as silent, powerless victims in a male-controlled society in urgent need of "liberation". This image fits conveniently into the big picture of the Iraqi people being passive victims who would welcome the occupation of their country.

The reality is different. Iraqi women were actively involved in public life even under the Ottoman empire. In 1899 the first schools for girls were established, the first women's organisation in 1924. By 1937 there were four women's magazines published in Baghdad.

Women were involved in the 1920 revolution against British occupation, including in fighting. In the 50s, political parties established women's organisations. All reflected the same principle: fighting alongside men, women were also liberating themselves. That was proven in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution ending the British-imposed monarchy when women's organisations achieved within two years what over 30 years of British occupation failed to: legal equality.

This process led Unicef to report in 1993: "Rarely do women in the Arab world enjoy as much power as they do in Iraq ... men and women must receive equal pay for equal work. A wife's income is recognised as independent from her husband's. In 1974, education was made free at all levels, and in 1979 it was made compulsory for girls and boys until the age of 12." By the early 90s, Iraq had one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab world. There were more professional women in positions of power than in almost any other Middle Eastern nation

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The tragedy was that women were living under Saddam's oppressive regime. True, women occupied high political positions, but they did nothing to protest at the injustice inflicted on their sisters who opposed the regime.

The same is happening now in "the new democratic Iraq". After "liberation", Bush and Blair trumpeted women's advancement as a centrepiece of their vision for Iraq. In the White House, hand-picked Iraqi women recited desperately needed homilies to justify the invasion of Iraq. In June, nominal sovereignty was handed over to a US-appointed Iraqi interim government, including six women cabinet ministers. They were not elected by Iraqi people.

Under Ayad Allawi's regime, "multinational forces" remain immune from legal redress, rarely accountable for crimes committed against Iraqis. The gap between women members of Allawi's regime and the majority of Iraqi women is widening by the day. While cabinet ministers and the US-UK embassies are cocooned inside the fortified green zone, Iraqis are denied the basic right of walking safely in their own streets. Right of road is for US tanks labelled: "If you pass the convoy you will be killed."

Lack of security and fear of kidnapping make Iraqi women prisoners in their own homes. They witness the looting of their country by Halliburton, Bechtel, US NGOs, missionaries, mercenaries and local subcontractors, while they are denied clean water and electricity. In the land of oil, they have to queue five hours a day to get kerosene or petrol. Acute malnutrition has doubled among children. Unemployment at 70% is exacerbating poverty, prostitution, backstreet abortion and honour killing. Corruption and nepotism are rampant in the interim government. Al-Naqib, minister of interior admitted that he had appointed 49 of his relatives to high-ranking jobs, but only because they were qualified.

The killing of academics, journalists and scientists has not spared women: Liqa Abdul Razaq, a newsreader at al-Sharqiyya TV, was shot with her two-month-old baby. Layla al-Saad, dean of law at Mosul University was slaughtered in her house.

The silence of the "feminists" of Allawi's regime is deafening. The suffering of their sisters in cities showered with napalm, phosphorus and cluster bombs by US jet fighters, the death of about 100,000 Iraqi civilians, half of them women and children, is met with rhetoric about training for democracy.

Tony Blair, acknowledged yesterday in Baghdad that violence would continue both before and after the January 30 elections, but added: "On the other hand we will have a very clear expression of democratic will." Does he not know that "democracy" is what Iraqi women use nowadays to frighten their naughty children, by shouting: "Quiet, or I'll call democracy."

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

Violence against women in Iraq under US Occupation

March 17, 2006

AFTER SADDAM, IRAQI WOMEN USED AS SEX OBJECTS

http://www.aljazeera.com/me.asp?service_ID=10709

3/14/2006 8:15:00 AM GMT

"The extent to which women have lost their rights in Iraq is shocking"

Violence against women has increased dramatically since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. They have been kidnapped, killed, raped, and even sold to foreign countries for the global prostitution network, the Woman Freedom Organization (WFO), a Baghdad-based NGO, said in a report earlier this month.

"We've studied reports from local NGOs on women's rights in the past three years, including violence, kidnappings, forced prostitution and honor killings," WFO President Senar Mohammad told *Reuters*. "And the extent to which women have lost their rights in Iraq is shocking."

According to the WFO study, the most worrying trend was the kidnappings of women, many of whom reported being sexually abused or tortured. "Kidnapping and raping women has become so widespread that every woman worries that she may become the next victim. Very few women are seen on the streets. It was not like that before the war, no! Many are frightened to step out of their home," an unidentified Iraqi woman said.

More than 2,000 Iraqi women have been kidnapped since April 2003, the report said, adding that such incidents were largely unknown during Saddam Hussein's regime. "Money has become more important than lives, and kidnapping women – easy targets because of their weakness – is a quicker way to get a good ransom," said Mohammad.

Moreover, the study says that several Iraqi women were being sold as sex workers abroad, mainly to the illegal markets in Yemen, Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States. Victims usually discover their fate only after they have been lured outside Iraq 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 woman who was deceived by traffickers into going to Kuwait. "Because 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," she said painfully. "I lost my virginity to a 65-year-old man who bought me at a very high price and who slept with me everyday until I ran away and arranged my return to **Iraq.**"

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Sexual abuses

The report also raised concerns about the conditions of women detainees currently held in prisons run by the U.S. and UK occupation forces, pointing to the Al-Kadhimiya and Abu-Ghraib prisons in particular. "Based on our records and from anonymous information, we estimate that there are more than 250 women in these two prisons alone, who are exposed to different kinds of torture, including sexual abuses," Mohammad said.

"I was kidnapped and sexually abused," said Surra Abdu, who spent two months in al-Kadhimiya prison. "But after I was released and reported the matter to the police, they interrogated me and hurt me more, saying I was in cahoots with my jailers." Abdu added: "Is that the freedom and security offered to us when Saddam was toppled?"

The Iraqi Interior Ministry denies that women detainees were regularly subject to mistreatment. "We're Muslims, and we know very well how to treat our women prisoners," said top ministry official Ahmed Youssifin.

But the WFO rejects the government's assertions, insisting that it has abundant evidence of the abuse of women detainees. "It's very difficult to believe women are being well-treated in Iraqi prisons," he said. "Many times have I seen signs of torture and beatings on their faces after they were released."

Some of the photos that U.S. guards shot at Abu Ghraib show a U.S. military policeman "having sex with an Iraqi woman," according to Maj Gen Taguba, who headed a 2005 investigation into abuses of female detainees at the hands of U.S. guards. The Taguba report also stated that U.S. guards committed other crimes against Iraqi women for their entertainment. "An Iraqi woman in her 70s had been harnessed and ridden like a donkey at Abu Ghraib and another coalition detention center after being arrested last July," the report said.

Lawyers of women prisoners also assert that U.S. guards had been raping women detainees and forcing them to strip naked in front of men. They also said that these crimes were being committed all across Iraq. According to an Iraqi female lawyer, identified as Swadi, a woman prisoner at a U.S. military base in al-Kharkh told her that "she had been raped... several American soldiers had raped her. She had tried to fight them off and they had hurt her arm."

There is reason to believe that these abuses are still going on. When Swadi tried to visit women detainees at Abu Ghraib recently, U.S. guards refused to let her in. When she complained, they threatened to arrest her.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



It is obvious that these abuses are horrible. What is so painful is that the oppression of Iraqi women won't end soon. It will also have a devastating impact on the way of life of the Iraqi people -- thanks to the U.S./UK invasion.

Women of the new Iraq

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/755/re8.htm>

Al-Ahram Weekly -- 11 - 17 August 2005 Issue No. 755

Women's rights in Iraq have not been destroyed by Islam but by the destruction of state and society brought on by foreign military aggression, writes Haifaa Zangana*

In an effort to pressure politicians framing Iraq's new constitution not to limit women's rights, a forefront group of Iraqi women recently met the US ambassador. Many Western feminist groups and some Iraqi women activists fear Islamic law, if enshrined as a main source of legislation, will be used to restrict their rights, specifically in matters relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance. The US shares this concern. Iraqi women more generally do not. Why?

Most Iraqi women recognise and try to sensitively cope with the predicament of dealing with occupation and the rise of reactionary practices affecting their rights and way of life. This applies across the political and social class spectrum, to the secular left as much as to moderate Islamists and nationalists. They also feel that writing the constitution is not their priority for the time being. They believe that to write such a crucial document it is important for people concerned to be able to think clearly, to think of tomorrow. To do that one must be liberated from today's fears and able to enjoy basic human rights, such as walking safely in the streets of one's city. Iraqi women are not.

Despite all the rhetoric about "building a new democracy", Iraqis are buckled under the burdens of abuse and plunder committed by the US-led occupation and its local Iraqi sub-contractors. Daily life for most Iraqis is still a struggle for survival, with tragedies and atrocities engulfing them. Human rights under occupation have proved to be a mirage similar to weapons of mass destruction. Torture and ill treatment of members of political and armed groups, even the torture of children held in adult facilities, is widespread. Depleted uranium and other banned weapons have been used against various Iraqi cities by US-UK troops, including the MK-77 incendiary bomb, a modern form of napalm.

Iraqi women were long the most liberated in the Middle East. Occupation has confined them to their homes. A typical Iraqi woman's day begins with the struggle to get the basics: electricity, petrol or a cylinder of gas, fresh water, food and medication. It ends with a sigh of relief for surviving death

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



threats and violent attacks. For a majority of Iraqi women, simply venturing into the streets harbours the possibility of attack or kidnapping for profit or revenge. Young girls are sold to neighbouring countries for prostitution.

In the land of oil, 16 million Iraqis rely on monthly food rations for survival. They have not received any since May. Privatisation threatens all free public services. Acute malnutrition has doubled among children. Unemployment at 70 per cent is exacerbating poverty, prostitution, backstreet abortions and honour killings. Corruption and nepotism are rampant in the interim government. Gender is no obstacle. Layla Abdul-Latif, minister of transport under Iyad Allawi's regime, is under investigation for corruption. Her male colleague Ayham Al Sammarai, minister of electricity, managed to flee the country.

Women's political participation in the interim government, national assembly and even the committee appointed to write the constitution, follows a quota system imposed by Paul Bremer, ex-US-imposed de facto ruler of Iraq, who engineered a process for reproducing the US-appointed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), to prolong the occupation and incite sectarian and ethnic conflicts. Iraqi women's historical struggle against colonial occupation, for national unity, social justice and legal equality, has been reduced to sheer bickering among a handful of "women leaders" over nominal political posts. The quota system has widened the gap between women members of interim governments and the majority of Iraqi women.

Powerless, holed up in guarded areas or the US-fortified Green Zone, venturing out only in daylight with armed escorts, and with no credibility among Iraqi women, the failure of these "leaders" is catastrophic. Like their male colleagues, they have adopted a selective approach to human rights, principally US-oriented. The suffering of their sisters in cities showered with napalm, phosphorus and cluster bombs by US jet fighters, the death of about 100,000 Iraqis, half of them women and children, is met with rhetoric about training women for leadership and democracy.

Documents released 7 March 2005 by the American Civil Liberties Union show 13 cases of rape and abuse of female detainees. The documents revealed that no action was taken against any soldier or civilian official as a result. The documents also provide further evidence that US troops have destroyed evidence of abuse and torture in order to avoid a repetition of last year's Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal. The silence of women members of the National Assembly, interim government and all USAID-financed women NGOs, is deafening. "Women's rights" in Iraq has become an absurd discourse chewing on meaningless words.

No wonder that US-financed women NGOs, who publicly preach women's rights and democracy, are suspected of being vehicles for foreign manipulation and are despised and boycotted, however much they manage to recruit liberal or left personalities.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Iraqi women know that the enemy is not Islam. There is a strong antipathy to anyone trying to recruit women's issues to the racist "war on terror" set up against the world of Islam. Women also know that traditional society, exemplified by the neighbourhood and extended family, however restrictive at times, is not the enemy. In fact, it has been the mainstay and protector of women and children in both physical safety and welfare, despite lowest common denominator demands on dress and personal conduct. The enemy is the collapse of the state and civil society. And the culprit for that is the foreign military invasion and occupation.

* The writer is a London-based Iraqi novelist.

A woman's place is in the struggle: Iraqi women worse off under US-led occupation

The US rulers have constructed many false pretexts and downright lies to justify their invasions, occupations and exploitation of other nations. In the Middle East, the “liberation of women” has been a common rationale in Washington's effort to win the support of ordinary people in the West for its brutal foreign policy.

Washington's alleged desire to free Afghan women from the Taliban's male supremacist repression was a major part of the propaganda push accompanying the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Now, more than three years later, far from winning new-found freedom, daily life for women in Afghanistan is marked by violence, poverty and gross discrimination.

“Trafficking of women is on the rise in Afghanistan, as is rape, forced marriage, drug use, and senseless acts of everyday violence”, stated a March 1 media statement issued by the US division of ActionAid International charity organisation. “In the meantime, a third of women living in Kabul are not permitted to leave their homes. They have no inheritance rights, find it nearly impossible to divorce, and are struggling to regain their health, livelihoods, and a sense of place.”

Fewer and fewer people now believe the US and Australian governments' lies about why the “coalition of the killing” continues its murderous occupation of Iraq, which has killed more than 100,000 Iraqis. More and more people have long forgotten the transparent, false promises of the “liberation” for the Iraqi people as the US-led occupation has been exposed for what it is — the brutal securing of profits for giant oil companies.

The US government, however, continues to peddle its lies about helping Iraqis to achieve “democracy” and “freedom”, yet a new report by Amnesty International lays to rest any idea that the US war and occupation have improved the lives of Iraqi women.

The report, *Iraq — Decades of Suffering*, released on February 22, says that women are not better off now than they were under Saddam Hussein's regime. In fact, Iraqi women have been subjected to increased murders and sexual violence, including at the hands of the US forces themselves.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



According to Amnesty, "Women have been subjected to sexual threats by members of the US-led forces and some women detained by US forces have been sexually abused, possibly raped".

Amnesty interviewed women who spoke of beatings, humiliation, solitary confinement and threats of rape when they were detained by US troops.

Insecurity for women has increased since the invasion and many basic freedoms have been curtailed, such as women's freedom of movement, including to attend school and work. The law continues to allow men to beat their wives without punishment, and perpetrators of "honour killings" are treated leniently.

Women suffered greatly under the rule of Saddam Hussein and the decade of crippling United Nations sanctions against Iraq. Now they face a deadly imperialist occupation that is opposed by an overwhelming majority of Iraqi people.

The first step toward Iraqi women gaining control of their own lives will be when every last coalition soldier leaves their country. An end to the barbaric occupation is a precondition for democracy and freedom in Iraq, and for furthering the struggle for the real liberation of Iraqi women.

Rally for the rights of Iraqi women and demand that the Australian government withdraw its troops immediately — join the March 20 international protest actions in your city!

<http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2005/619/619p8b.htm>

Occupation Is Not (Women's) Liberation Part I

Confronting 'Imperial Feminism' and Building a Feminist Anti-War Movement

by Huibin Amee Chew; March 24, 2005

Iraqi author and dissident Haifa Zangana, formerly imprisoned under Saddam Hussein's regime but adamantly opposed to U.S. occupation, writes, "in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution ending the British-imposed monarchy [in Iraq]... women's organizations achieved within two years what over 30 years of British occupation failed to: legal equality." [1]

Two years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, what are we to make of the Bush administration's alleged project to bring it democracy and raise the status of women? Early on following the invasion, mainstream U.S. media such as The New York Times reported on growing insecurity, including the escalating rapes and kidnappings of women and girls. The media tended to frame this problem as caused by Iraqi men and indigenous patriarchy at its roots - with skillful U.S. intervention needed to alleviate the situation. The U.S. anti-war, anti-occupation movement was largely unable to deliver an adequate response to the immediate issue of daily sexual violence at the hands of Iraqis - how has it failed to tackle issues particular to Iraqi women, and what is at stake?

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



This essay is a plea for greater feminist intervention in the U.S. anti-imperialist, anti-war movement. It is also about the relevance of an anti-imperialist perspective to the U.S. feminist movement, in fighting domestic patriarchy. It comes in two parts. In Part One, I discuss how the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq have not brought liberation to Iraqi women - but rather, resulted in the worsening of living conditions along gendered lines. I underpin the need for a stronger anti-imperialist feminist movement that opposes the occupation of Iraq, but hint at the limits of current political discourse. In Part Two, I elaborate on my critique of the U.S. anti-war movement, calling for feminists to get involved and hold it accountable, particularly since imperialism operates through the connections between gendered foreign and domestic oppressions.

Part 1: 'Liberating' and planting 'democracy' in Iraq and Afghanistan? Whose 'democracy'?

The justification of imperialism on humanitarian grounds has a sordid history that U.S. feminists - as stakeholders in the world's premier military and economic superpower - would do well to study. British colonialists pointed to the barbaric status of Indian women as an argument for their 'benevolent' intervention. On sure footing about their own moral superiority, English feminists were all too quick to lend support for this project. By the late 19th century, the British government was cynically exploiting the zeal of slavery abolitionists, as a convenient fig leaf over its scramble for Africa.[2]

Lately, Third World feminists are rewriting the gendered history of empire. Their observations remain relevant to current affairs. They draw a complex picture of patriarchal collusion between male elites of both the occupying and subject states. And they shed light on how the supposed beneficiaries of imperial magnanimity are lost in the shuffle of their rulers' own more pressing economic and political interests.

This entangled history of complicity and exploitation should make U.S. feminists uncomfortable. To raise a few questions that are pertinent today, and that I hope to resonate with: how do paternalistic leaders continue to maneuver and manipulate the interests of certain women and minorities for imperial ends? Have they 'co-opted' feminist aims - and if so, whose feminism? While claiming to stand for womankind, do they exploit or depend upon the fractures in this 'sisterhood'? Who do they pit against each other in this process - and whose agendas are served when feminists willingly cooperate?

The Bush administration has flaunted the liberation of Muslim women, and later the propagation of women-friendly democracy, as central principles justifying its invasions and subsequent occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq. The ideological coherence of acting as humanitarian benefactor is a unifying theme behind the otherwise fractured, amnesiac rationale to this administration's foreign policy, that has bounced between fears of terrorism, supposed weapons of mass destruction, and evil

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



dictatorships. Pursuing this common thread, let me first briefly detour to revisit what has happened in Afghanistan, before discussing Iraq more extensively - as a prelude and even a warning for the latter expedition.

Afghanistan and the complicity of American feminists

In the weeks after 9/11, the Taliban's public executions of women were catapulted into mainstream view, as a focus of prime-time TV documentaries. Years-old email forwards about the Taliban's abuses began to recirculate among socially conscious youth, as the position of burqa-ed Muslim women grew to a matter of mainstream interest. Following the invasion of Afghanistan, Laura Bush was paraded before the UN Commission on the Status of Women on International Women's Day 2002, to celebrate the U.S. attack as a new chapter of "rebuilding" Afghani women's lives. Her husband continues to incessantly remind us how he has birthed a "new constitution, guaranteeing free elections and full participation by women,"[3] and opened education to both "boys and girls." [4]

Ironically, the originator of the grisly documentary footage of women's murders that made national television was the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) - a group vehemently opposed to both fundamentalist regimes and U.S. military intervention. RAWA had their own message on International Women's Day 2004: "The freedom of a nation is to be achieved by itself - similarly the real emancipation of women can be realized only by themselves. If that freedom is bestowed by others, it may be seized and violated any time." [5]

A long-standing group that has resisted occupation since the 1979-1988 Soviet war in Afghanistan, RAWA has no naïve illusions about outside powers' ulterior motives. Today, it points to how the U.S. puppet regime's token Ministry of Women's Affairs and a few "apolitical and pro-fundamentalist" [6] female faces in government positions cannot outweigh the problems of "pauperization" and warlordism that continue to plague the country - with American collusion. Military action itself exacted a serious toll on ordinary Afghans unrelated to the Taliban regime. In a statement on the 2002 anniversary of 9/11, RAWA angrily proclaimed: ...

U.S. military might moved into action to punish its erstwhile hirelings. A captive, bleeding, devastated, hungry ... Afghanistan was bombed into oblivion by the most advanced and sophisticated weaponry ever created in human history. Innocent lives, many more than those who lost their lives in the September 11 atrocity, were taken. Even joyous wedding gatherings were not spared. The Taliban regime and its al-Qaeda support were toppled without any significant dent in their human combat resources. What was not done away with was the sinister shadow of terrorist threat over the whole world and its alter ego, fundamentalist terrorism. [7]

Noting the U.S. government's earlier material support for the Taliban, RAWA considered the real losers of the military attack - which it cynically regarded as a hypocritical public relations

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



demonstration of strength against terrorism, achieved partly through fanning the Americans' desire for "retribution" - to be Afghani civilians. Three years later, RAWA emphasizes that opium trade-related corruption and the reigns of local despots remain entrenched, with dire consequences for the impoverished majority of Afghans.

The Bush administration's policy has been to put its own regional interests first - inevitably resulting in conflicts with real democracy or human rights for Afghans, including most women. Desperate to prop up its shaky control, the U.S. government in fact proved willing to reopen talks with a faction of the Taliban in the summer of 2003. Moreover, the U.S. military collaborated with the Northern Alliance from the outset of the invasion, and now entrusts this group the stability of large portions of the country. RAWA has labeled the Northern Alliance as the Taliban's "brethren-in-creed" for its brutality and misogynist human rights abuses.[8] Propped up by a U.S. military guard, the influence of Hamid Karzai's regime remains confined primarily to Kabul even after much-touted elections, while a mile away young women self-immolate out of destitution. Warlords were bribed with tens of millions of dollars to provide at least tacit support to Karzai during the recent elections, and still control 80 percent of Afghanistan.[9] For these reasons, RAWA berates the legacy of U.S. invasion: "For the people of Afghanistan, it is 'out of the frying pan, into the fire.'"[10]

RAWA prescribes an alternative method for social change: the intensification of mass movements and struggles by local Afghans against their oppressors. Yet despite its fame, including publicity from celebrities like Eve Ensler, RAWA's anti-war, pro-local movement stance has largely been ignored in American press. Liberal American feminists have helped enforce this silence by not acting to widely disseminate its analysis.

To the contrary - prominent feminist organizations were complicit in aiding Bush's justification of the war on Afghanistan. Shortly after the bombardment began, leader of the Feminist Majority Eleanor Smeal met amicably with war generals: "They went off about the role of women in this effort and how imperative it was that women were now in every level of the Air Force and Navy ... It's a different kind of war," she is quoted as reporting about their chat.[11] This tete-a-tete rode on years of feminist campaigning against the Taliban. In Part Two, I will more fully explore the omissions of liberal mainstream feminism and some of their consequences for U.S. patriarchy.

What has happened in Iraq? A brief background to women's status before invasion

Haifa Zangana, quoted at the beginning of this piece, writes the following in opposition to the U.S. occupation: "The main misconception is to perceive Iraqi women as silent, powerless victims in a male-controlled society in urgent need of 'liberation.' This image fits conveniently into the big picture of the Iraqi people being passive victims who would welcome the occupation of their country. The reality is different." [12]

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



In 1958, with the end of British indirect rule over Iraq, tens of thousands of Iraqi women demonstrated in the streets for their civil rights. They won the most egalitarian family civil code in the Arab world. Aspects of this progressive family law persisted until the eve of U.S. invasion, when Iraq still remained exceptional in the region. Divorce cases were to be heard only in civil courts, polygamy was outlawed unless the first wife consented, and women divorcees had an equal right to custody over their children.[13] Women's income was recognized as independent from their husbands'.

When Iraq's expanding economy needed women in the workforce during the 1970s and early 80s, Saddam Hussein's regime implemented policies to encourage their participation, such as generous maternity leaves, equal pay and benefits, and free higher education. For instance, the radical feminist group Redstockings has pointed out how before U.S. invasion, Iraq provided 62 days of maternity leave with the woman's wages paid 100% by its social security system. Its valuable analysis, focusing on economic arrangements and class inequality, hints towards what U.S. feminists - we ourselves - have to lose if we keep privileging our own country, with its rampantly privatized healthcare, as the epitome of women's liberation. Unlike the US, in fact nearly all Gulf states have provisions for paid maternity leave. By contrast, Redstockings notes that U.S. law offers 12 weeks of unpaid sick leave - if your employer has over 50 employees, and only if you have been working for the same employer for more than a year (the U.S. is also one of a handful of countries that still provides no paid parental leave).[14]

Despite Iraqi women's significant gains, their condition began to decline after the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War bankrupted the government. The Gulf War and subsequent US/UN sanctions exacerbated this process by crippling Iraq's economy.[15] The economic hardships disproportionately affected women and girls. In the early 1980s, women had made up 40 percent of the nation's workforce, filling the war-time shortage of men.[16] This deteriorated to 22% by 1992. Prostitution increased, and as women became jobless, their right to travel without a male relative was revoked. Childcare, education, and transportation became impossibly expensive. Female literacy dropped sharply after the Gulf War as girls abandoned school to help with increasingly inconvenient household chores - resulting in the second largest gender gap in literacy for the region.[17] In post-Gulf War years, more than a third of girls abandoned formal schooling before completing primary education.[18] UNESCO reports that while 75% of Iraqi women were literate in 1987, this dropped to under 25% by 2001![19] At the same time, Hussein allowed a shift towards local religious and tribal codes; he amended the law in 1990 to permit honor killings without penalty. In the late 1990s, Hussein implemented new laws dismissing all female secretaries in government agencies and restricting women from work in the public sector. Economic hardships and political attacks worked in conjunction with each other to roll back the status of women; the connections between Iraqi women's loss of paid economic power and increased vulnerability to patriarchal attacks demands further exploration.

In the context of over 12 years of debilitating sanctions, the U.S. occupation must be viewed as only the latest chapter of our government's hand in the dramatic decline of conditions for Iraqi women.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Nevertheless, in spite of their fragile position just before the 2003 invasion, Iraqi women constituted a larger portion of the paid workforce than women of many other Gulf States. To focus on an elite subsection of the population - more professional women held positions of power than in almost any other Middle Eastern country. In 1994, 11% of seats in Iraq's congress were filled by women, a percentage significantly higher than in other Gulf states. U.S. women, incidentally, held only 10% of seats in Congress the same year. Earlier, in 1987, Iraqi women had filled 13% of seats, compared to 5% held by U.S. women the same year.[20]

The impact of invasion and occupation in Iraq

The U.S. invasion and occupation have caused enormous violence and economic devastation since then. As of October 2004, the Lancet estimated that military action and the subsequent occupation had resulted in the excess deaths of at least 100,000 Iraqis. Women and children of both sexes together made up the majority of those violently killed by coalition forces in this study. [21] Acute malnutrition among children is now double pre-occupation levels - translating to 400,000 children who suffer from "wasting," or dangerous protein deficiency.[22] Unemployment hovers at over 70 percent.

In a country where 55 to 65% of the current population is female, of course women and girls are heavily affected by these conditions. Reiterating the pattern during the 1990s sanctions, Iraqi women are the hardest hit by unemployment. Men are preferred for the few jobs available - although many women are widows or single heads of households. [23] Moreover, formerly 72 percent of salaried Iraqi women were public employees, so many lost their jobs when government ministries dismantled after invasion.[24] While before the invasion, indigent women could at least rely on food rationing, today they are left to fend for themselves.

While the U.S. continues to bomb Iraqi hospitals, electricity in large cities remains intermittent, water unsafe, telephones non-operational. At the time of our November presidential elections, the Bush administration instigated increased bombing runs in Iraq, secure that the papers and public opinion would be focused elsewhere - but the tactic of aerial bombardment is particularly deadly to noncombatants who just happen to be in the way. Almost two years after the invasion, reconstruction is damningly absent. As of late December, only \$2.2 billion of the \$18.4 billion allotted for reconstruction had been spent, according to the Bush administration's own quarterly report.[25] Iraqis are facing overwhelming burdens in carrying out the simplest tasks for household subsistence; Zangana discusses the extra toil that falls on women responsible for finding clean water and basic cooking supplies, writing, "In the land of oil, they have to queue five hours a day to get kerosene or petrol." [26]

Rapes of women and girls skyrocketed after the invasion, with the displacement of usual law and order. But investigating these were no priority of U.S. authorities, who had toppled the previous police

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



and court system, only to replace it with makeshift and illegitimate military force. Instead, occupying troops were engaged in arbitrary roundups and killings in pursuit of terrorist insurgents, that brutalized locals and ransacked their homes. Misplaced and heavy-handed conduct put together, the occupation has failed to offer real security; kidnapping and the growth of trafficking now keeps women and girls in fear of venturing outside - "prisoners in their own homes," in Zangana's words.[27]

A May 2004 Red Cross report disclosed that 70 to 90 percent of 43,000 Iraqis detained in the last year were arrested by mistake.[28] Today, in a form of collective punishment, coalition authorities regularly imprison the female relatives (and even alleged lovers) of male suspects, to use as hostages. Needless to say such treatment utterly denies that women have a separate legal status from their husbands, brothers, fathers, sons, or alleged lovers. Along with the other innocent detainees, these women are imprisoned for supposed 'intelligence purposes' - in other words, because the occupying authorities deem it convenient and have no accountability to the public. Belying the focus on male prisoners in the Abu Ghraib scandal, the sexual abuse and gang rape of female detainees is widespread - a fact known throughout in Iraq that has received little attention in the U.S.[29]

Iraq contains the world's second largest oil reserves, and the U.S. has already begun building bases on its soil. The U.S. government's priorities - besides establishing control over these reserves to influence world oil price fluctuation - have been to privatize and sell entire sectors of Iraq's economy, as well as lucrative 'reconstruction' contracts, to corporate cronies of our military-industrial complex. Besides major defense contractors like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Northrop Grumman, which received boosts from the invasion itself, Halliburton, Bechtel and other corporate heavies have won no-bid contracts to 'reconstruct' Iraq and manage its infrastructure. They have reaped tremendous profits at the expense of Iraqis and U.S. taxpayers. Although reports of fraud abound, the investments of U.S. corporations in Iraq are backed up risk-free by the Iraq Development Fund - formerly the UN oil-for-food program - which consists mainly of Iraq's oil revenues.

The U.S. occupation authority restructured Iraq's economy in flagrant violation of international law on occupation - needless to say, without the democratic consent of Iraqis. Besides the sale of national industries to private corporations, its 'shock therapy' reforms included the liberalization of foreign investment, taxes, and tariffs. The corporate tax rate was capped at an extremely low 15%. J.P. Morgan now manages the newly formed Trade Bank of Iraq, set up to favor companies from contributing nations, regardless of the quality and price of their products. Through it, Iraqi ministries can borrow funds to buy equipment from overseas suppliers - by mortgaging national oil revenues.

Despite their profiteering, corporations have actually managed to sue Iraq for millions of dollars in 'war reparations' for 'lost profits.' Iraq is now saddled with a debt of \$200 million in such 'reparations' to companies like Bechtel, Halliburton, Shell, Mobil, Nestle, Pepsi, KFC, and Toys R Us.[30] What's worse, this debt is dwarfed by an unpayable sovereign debt of \$125 billion. The industrialized nations that are its creditors are working to make the sovereign debt's partial cancellation contingent on

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



compliance with IMF austerity programs - that will wreak economic havoc on the majority of Iraqis. Feminists have extensively documented the disproportionate impact IMF structural adjustment programs have had on poor women in other countries.

The Bush administration is more committed to ensuring control over Iraq's oil reserves, and enforcing an economy dominated by U.S. corporations, than to the rights and well-being of Iraqi people. Using military control to pursue its economic strategic interests continues to run in direct conflict with, and come at the expense of, accountability to the Iraqi public. Its harsh measures further undermine the occupiers' legitimacy. The Bush administration's hypocrisy and lies have been evident in the conduct of its occupying forces. From the beginning of the occupation, U.S. forces stopped or nullified elections in a number of cities, repeatedly used violence to repress peaceful public protests, raided and sacked the offices of Iraqi trade unions, and shut down newspapers. The U.S. has installed a series of puppet governing authorities. Unfortunately, the newly 'elected' regime is will only prove to be the latest in a string of nominal 'handovers' staged to divert public opinion. Naomi Klein has noted that if anything, significant support for the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) in the elections, and the routing of the U.S.'s handpicked stooge, Iyad Allawi, represented a strong vote against U.S. occupation.[31] The second plank of the UIA's platform called for a timetable to the withdrawal of multinational forces in Iraq, while other aspects repudiated the economic restructuring under Bremer. A Zogby poll two days before the election found that 82 percent of Sunni and 69 percent of Shiites favored U.S. forces withdrawing immediately or after an elected government is in place.[32] Yet the Pentagon plans troop escalations and the government has no intention of ending either military or economic occupation - much less setting a timetable for such. The war is not and has not been about bringing democracy to Iraq.

Altogether, the occupation has reinforced and colluded with endemic patriarchy to worsen the situation of Iraqi women. Its gendered effects have been to intensify the harms of patriarchy in Iraq, adding new levels of violence and deprivation. If Iraqi men are perpetuating the kidnappings and rapes of women, they do so in the context of the occupying authorities' carelessness and inability to foster security. If Iraqi women face job discrimination, severe economic hardships have only worsened their plight. Zangana suggests some of unemployment's gendered effects: "Unemployment... is exacerbating ... prostitution, backstreet abortion and honour killing." [33]

Why won't occupation bring liberation to Iraqi women?

The U.S. occupation cannot represent the best interests of Iraqi women because of the ulterior motives part and parcel to the structures of its enforcement. Its lack of democratic transparency and accountability to Iraqis - as well as our own government's lack of accountability to the U.S. public - are barriers to the reform of the occupation's ground operations, and the main motives that shape them. Furthermore, the Bush administration, and the military-industrial complex it represents, only benefit, at least in the short-term, from substituting true accountability with P.R. stunts.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Putting its maintenance of indirect regional control first, the Bush administration has proved willing to collaborate with conservative elements in its hand-picked Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), as well as its ensuing puppet authorities - recalling its tactics in Afghanistan. From the first meeting for post-Baathist reconstruction, where only four out of 80 delegates were women, to the IGC where three out of 25 seats were filled by women (before one was assassinated), the U.S. government has decreased the upper-level government representation of women by filling their former parliamentary seats with men.[34] The former IGC included conservative forces which passed a resolution for sharia law to replace the standardized family civil code, essentially allowing for the despotism of local clerics to legislate the role of women in families. Thousands of Iraqi women took to the streets and helped raise an international outcry that caused Paul Bremer to eventually overturn the resolution.[35] While this move allowed Bremer to pose as the savior of women's rights, in reality the Bush administration has been hedging its political bets, if you will. The Bush administration appointed conservative Islamists to power, only to defy them when politically practical. The dynamics of the above controversy over sharia illustrate the limits of the occupation's commitment to women's equality, because the U.S.'s first priority is to remain in control over Iraq's oil and economy. Meanwhile, other women did not even bother to protest the controversial resolution because they felt the IGC irrelevant and inactive regarding the problems of their daily lives.[36]

At times, the Bush administration's gestures at uplifting Iraqi women are clearly an empty hoax for feminism, that should disturb even liberals who support the occupation. This winter the U.S. State department launched a \$10 million "Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative," to train women in political participation for the January election. Most of the money was allocated to organizations embedded in the Bush administration - including the reactionary Independent Women's Forum (IWF). The IWF was founded by Lynne Cheney, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, and rightwing National Review editor Kate O'Beirne in 1991, as a counter to the so-called "radical feminism" of NOW. Ironically - given Iraq's history - IWF is opposed to, among other things, paid maternity leave, government-provided childcare, equal pay for equal work (because it violates 'free market' principles), minimum quotas for women in government service, and the Violence Against Women Act. [37]

The Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative can be seen as just one instance of the paternalism inherent in the State Department's democracy trainings more generally. Past orchestrated events tutoring what democracy means - because Iraqis need to be instructed about their own interests - have involved scripted panels performed before audiences, without any room for confrontational questioning or genuine dialogue. Zangana's infuriation is understandable:

There has been no shortage of initiatives to "enlighten" Iraqi woman and encourage them to play an active role in the country's reconstruction. In one, the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office declared "the need, urgently, for a women's tent meeting in Baghdad with a declaration in compliance with 1325"... Condoleezza Rice opened a center for women's human rights in Diwanya. In her opening speech - delivered via satellite - she assured Iraqi women that "we are with

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



you in spirit"... Meanwhile in Diwanya itself, local farmers (many of them women) were unable to start the winter season because of unexploded cluster bombs on their land.[38]

Although token women have been appointed to political positions, Zangana criticizes their role as pawns of the occupation incapable of challenging its violence: "The silence of the 'feminists' of Allawi's regime is deafening. The suffering of their sisters in cities showered with napalm, phosphorus and cluster bombs by U.S. jet fighters... is met with rhetoric about training for democracy." [39]

Women and resistance - what now?

Rather than helping Iraqis, the Bush administration's posturing at defending women's interests has delimited a difficult and fraught political terrain for those committed to women's rights. Its pretensions at women's liberation, combined with the sheer brutality of the occupation, have only narrowed possibilities for resistance that is both feminist and anti-imperialist, by placing feminist organizers in a tough political bind - in terms of both constructing ideological appeals and taking practical action. For one, as the place of women becomes a contested battleground between nationalism and occupation, it grows harder for feminist organizers to independently push an agenda that risks coming in conflict with nationalist conservatives. That is, the ideological confusion created by the U.S. occupation posing as feminist lends credence to reactionaries who further an anti-woman agenda in the name of nationalism - and when patriarchal actors begin with the upper hand in terms of political power, they may be in a better place to define the character of a unifying nationalist movement than feminists trying to carve their own space.

But moreover, and inseparable from the above dynamic, U.S.-perpetrated violence itself is a driving force of the course that resistance takes - an insurgency that has spun out of U.S. control. Arundhati Roy puts it well when she writes,

...attractions in New Iraq include ... Television stations bombed. Reporters killed. U.S. soldiers have opened fire on crowds of unarmed protestors killing scores of people. The only kind of resistance that has managed to survive is as crazed and brutal as the occupation itself. Is there space for a secular, democratic, feminist, non-violent resistance in Iraq? There isn't really.[40]

The U.S. administration has purposefully ignored and suppressed non-violent mass movements as contrary to its geopolitical goals. Since 100,000 Iraqi protesters peacefully called for immediate, direct elections in early 2004, Fallujah has been leveled - a policy of "destroying a city in order to save it," to use Tariq Ali's words - and thousands slaughtered. Violent resistance now maintains its momentum, with our military barely able to hold its ground beyond key installations and the Green Zone. Despite our attempts to bomb Iraq into submission, we are unable to win the peace militarily; the Bush administration struggles to gather whatever reserve forces it can find.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

Women have not been absent from participating in violent resistance against the occupation, even if they are a minority of combatants. In July 2004, press reported over 150 women in the rebel cleric Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army, trained as suicide bombers, weapons experts, and intelligence agents. Women fought alongside men during al Sadr's uprising against U.S. forces in April, and hundreds have marched in demonstrations as the conservative religious cleric's sympathizers.[41] While the insurgency is diverse and not limited to Islamist groups, it remains to be seen if women in these movements will effectively claim their place as political and social equals to men.

Women's organizing has been shaped significantly and hindered by the occupation's direct repression, as well as the attacks on women it has unleashed. When women are afraid to even step outdoors, their possibilities for political participation are circumscribed. When women must deal first and foremost with the work of everyday survival, they may be less inclined to devote time to lobbying an irrelevant and unresponsive occupation authority for abstract rights; they may be increasingly relegated to the tasks of holding together their families. Now, when resistance is propelled by armed insurgency, women's involvement as equal participants on the same footing of men, given social norms and political inequality, will be marginalized until they organize against these conservative forces. At the same time, the brutality of the occupation lends urgency to those who would unite resistance under a reactionary agenda.

Occupation Is Not (Women's) Liberation Part II

Drawing the lines between imperialism and U.S. patriarchy - the need for feminist intervention in the anti-war movement

by Huibin Ameer Chew; March 24, 2005

So what course should be taken? Must we dismiss the political exploitation of Iraqi women as inevitable, as Roy's words might be interpreted to suggest? Iraqi women appear to be in a tenuous 'lose-lose' situation: they lose if U.S. military and economic occupation remain, plunging the country into further violent polarization and indigence; and possibly lose if the U.S. military immediately leaves, transferring power to male-dominated forces. A Women for Women International survey in 2004 found that 94% of Iraqi women want secure legal rights for women, around 80% believe in unlimited participation in local and national political councils, 95% want no restrictions on female education, and 57% want no restrictions on women's employment.[42] The Bush administration might like us to believe there are only two choices in the long-run - U.S. occupation or fundamentalist authoritarianism - but unfolding events only underline the imperative for an alternative to this bind. The struggle of groups like RAWA can serve as inspiration.

What U.S. feminists must realize is that it is not up to us to save Iraqi women, particularly through the means of a nontransparent, unaccountable military occupation that has worsened the situation in Iraq with time - and will only continue to do so. This strategy is not only paternalistic, it fails to exercise

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



sufficient skepticism about our government's ulterior motives. Our government, embedded in a military-industrial complex, does not want a truly democratic Iraq because then Iraqis might choose to defy its interests. How many more reports of torture, abuse, and killing by occupation forces will it take for us to decide that enough is enough?

I have attempted to illuminate the stakes of feminist collusion in U.S. imperialism, by questioning which women the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan have aided, and attempting to demonstrate how these occupations have only helped solidify patriarchal interests. Violence and sexual assault, unemployment, and political marginalization in Iraq and Afghanistan are only some impacts of occupation that have been gendered - rendering the political forces and concerns affecting occupied men and women distinct, even potentially at odds. However, meaningful change must be built and can be claimed by Iraqi and Afghani women and people as their own - without compromising appeals to U.S. military might and economic dominance.

I now turn to the sphere of domestic U.S. politics, to examine a glaring rift between current anti-war organizing against the occupation of Iraq, and mainstream feminist politics. I wish to call attention to the analytical omissions springing from this divide. The occupation of Iraq offers a case study of how imperialism and patriarchy are linked and mutually reinforcing - nevertheless, neither political group has mobilized a movement that adequately implicates the relation between these systems.

Partly due to its focus on individual women's professional advancement rather than gendered class issues, the U.S. feminist movement lacks a critique of militarism that its counterparts in other countries, from Chile to the UK, handle more adeptly. These latter movements have been influenced by an awareness of the class exploitation required for militarization, as well as other social inequalities from gendered oppression to racial strife, incubated in the process. In contrast, the failure of many U.S. liberal feminists to question militarism as a system, as well as class society, has too often resulted in sacrificing the interests of working-class and poor women in the U.S., as well as in those countries subject to U.S. aggression. Mainstream U.S. feminism's scrutiny of the military has centered more on pursuing the institution's diversification and acceptance of women within its ranks, than criticizing the role of U.S. armed forces on the world stage.

Julia Sudbury has called 'imperial feminism' a standpoint that "bemoan[s] the oppression of Third World women without acknowledging the role of racism, colonialism and economic exploitation ... which claims solidarity with Third World women and women of color, but in actuality contributes to the stereotyping of Third World cultures as 'barbaric' and 'uncivilized.'" [43] Disturbingly, as my discussion in Part One should have made clear, liberal mainstream feminism includes imperial feminist strains. In the historic April 2004 March for Women's Lives, the largest feminist activist mobilization in years, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked to speak. She described the right to choose as a "global imperative" related to fighting terrorism and opposing fundamentalists. Yet while serving under Bill Clinton, Albright defended economic sanctions and

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



military attacks on Iraq, despite being confronted with their costing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi women and children - her now infamous comment was that if 500,000 Iraqi children had died as a result of U.S./UN imposed economic sanctions, this "price" was "worth it." [44] Albright's gesture at solidarity during the March typifies imperial feminism, given her direct role in overseeing foreign policy towards Iraq.

Furthermore, the ongoing war in Iraq did not receive any mention by the March's official speakers. The massive rally fittingly center-staged the issue of reproductive choice - but the war with its tremendous costs, as well as the U.S.'s over-bloated military budget, as the world's number one military power, are not unrelated to access to healthcare and reproductive rights. As of November 2004, the war in Iraq had already cost \$150 billion in taxes, and the Bush administration recently asked for \$80 billion more this February. The rightwing is conveniently using the budgetary strains under the supposed necessity of war to lend urgency to social service cuts; the Bush administration has already targeted Social Security. Intimidated by the election year's climate, the March's leaders did not publicly make the connections between public spending for war, and the lack of resources for health services - ignoring substantial forces shaping patriarchal inequality. The March fell short of articulating concrete demands regarding the expansion of access to choice related to the allocation of resources, focusing simply on Roe vs. Wade and exhorting participants to 'vote' (for Kerry, who supported the war). This failure to substantially grapple with class exploitation, instead concentrating on abstract rights, hinders liberal feminism's ability to unite a constituency of women affected by economic constraints and concerned with broader healthcare access issues. Feminist activists have yet to fully take advantage of the opportunity to reframe the right-wing's debate on morality using war, poverty, and women's - especially working-class women's - lives. Although U.S. imperialism and its strategy of pre-emptive war will arguably shape the government's domestic policies for years to come, the mainstream feminist movement has been stilted in publicly recognizing this, and constrained in the extent of social change it is willing to fight for.

For their part, anti-war activists have rightly and frequently noted the tremendous impact of the U.S. occupation on Iraqi women in terms of sheer physical violence and death, wrought upon women as 'civilian' casualties. Women along with children are sprinkled throughout anti-war literature, used as archetypes of the ultimate innocent victims of U.S. military violence. Unfortunately, however, the anti-imperialist movement frequently does not extend a gendered analysis beyond this mere observation of carnage. By gendered analysis, I mean an analysis of patriarchy that does not simply note a few of its effects where convenient, but attempts to dissect its workings and processes - the gendered power dynamics by which these effects are produced.

This is different from simply the observation that women are harmed, or even that women are disproportionately harmed. It is also the examination and acknowledgement of how gendered exploitations produce those harms; and how this exploitation is irreducible to just class or economic exploitation that would otherwise apply to men or women equally. Furthermore, it involves a

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



broadened consideration of which women are harmed to include those who are not just the most convenient for male-dominated interests - in the case of the anti-war movement, this might include prioritizing the development of a response to the rape of Iraqi women by Iraqi men, not just U.S. occupiers, or a response to U.S. patriarchy.

In fact, the U.S. anti-war movement, in its ground operations - in its speeches, its articles, its events, and brochures - has for the most part failed to connect the dots between the current conditions of Iraqi women, and the Bush administration's fallacious hypocrisy in claiming to bring democracy and women's liberation. Because it simply does not place the situation of women in the center of its analysis as a high priority, it has failed to frame its observations within an articulation of the above argument, and moreover, a gendered analysis of why imperialism has failed Iraqi women particularly. This has made anti-war activism weaker as a movement - we have so far failed to effectively use the situation of women in Iraq to dismantle the Bush administration's ideological pretexts for war and reveal the true motivations of the occupation.

Unfortunately, the lack of appreciation for the situation of Iraqi women has been indicated by an absence of information in brochures and anti-war databases, of curiosity, and inquiry. For example, while www.occupationwatch.org includes an invaluable collection of news articles about Iraqi women reprinted from mainstream and alternative press, for a year it neglected an inquiry on the effects of occupying forces on women in terms of sexual violence and prostitution - paralleling the general press's neglect of this topic until articles began to appear in the UK. As noted in the beginning of this article, early on in the occupation before Iraqi women's organizations became famous in Western media, the mainstream press usually couched women's predicament in the assumption that continued occupation was necessary to improve their situation, focusing on Iraqi patriarchy as the problem. The anti-war movement has barely begun to deliver a response on that.

In male-dominated anti-imperialist groups that focus on economic exploitation, there has been a lack of attention to the economic effects of the occupation on women. Anti-war groups have handled the escalating sexual and domestic violence against Iraqi women by Iraqi men awkwardly, unable to present practical alternatives to immediately address this problem beyond vague calls for a male-dominated resistance to replace the occupiers. Most oddly, they have been silent on the abuse of female detainees. Perhaps this is because female detainees are few, but as a result the sexual power and patriarchal implications of this abuse has dropped off activists' radar. Ignoring female detainees allowed the anti-war movement to ignore striking connections between imperialism and U.S. rape culture. These omissions appear to reflect an analytical confusion about how to understand the collusion of two patriarchies within imperialism, as well as the course resistance to these systems should take.

When leftist groups from the Nader campaign to the Campus Anti-war Network fail to take seriously the predicament of Iraqi women, who constitute as much as 65% of the Iraq's population, they deflect

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



anti-imperialist attention and resources from the following questions: posed at the crudest level, what does it mean when resistance, whether union strikes or muhajideen violence, is led by men? And more importantly, what would it mean on a practical level, for a nationalist movement to be feminist in priorities and methods? Anti-war activists have failed to imagine and articulate an alternative that incorporates Iraqi women as equal political actors. While it is not the place of American organizations to command the Iraqi resistance and women's organizing for them, the inability to dream, to think of the possibility for better alternatives, weakens our anti-occupation message - as well as our ability to find Iraqi actors to work in solidarity with towards a truly progressive vision.

When we speak of supporting the right of Iraqi resistance to oppose U.S. occupation, this does not mean we necessarily have to lend verbal and material support to every tactic of resistance, or every ideology everyone fighting the occupation stands for. Constantly drawing attention to how resistance is fostered as a response to much larger-scale U.S. violence and wrongdoing, does not mean supporting it uncritically. Rather, we must be on the look out for the diversity of forms of organization that are developing in Iraq, and ready to offer solidarity to progressive struggles. We must build a different sort of internationalism to counter our government's exploitation.

For example, above I criticized the anti-war movement's narrow handling of sexual assault perpetrated by Iraqi men. One possibility for a different approach might have been to promote or seek to support the struggles of Iraqi women's organizations demanding a better response to rape - whether in terms of proper health services, a end to punishing the victims with honor killing, or the creation of democratic neighborhood militias to ensure security. Why is freedom from rape different from the right to food, safe water, or electricity? A variety of women's organizations opposed to occupation are springing up, and the U.S. anti-war movement should examine how it can concretely help local struggles by Iraqis around issues affecting lives, whether by donating resources, supporting protests to pressure occupation authorities, building an International Solidarity Movement.

But most pressingly considering our standpoint as U.S. feminists, male-dominated leftist groups have demonstrated their bad faith, their willingness to dismiss problems of systemic exploitation by gender and sexuality, when they do not tackle the interconnectedness of imperialism with U.S. patriarchy. Beyond taking up the cause of Iraqi women wounded by the U.S. military - in a manner quite undistinguishable from Iraqi nationalism of any stripe - the movement fails to explore what imperialism/patriarchy means for U.S. women. Addressing this nexus requires an expanded view of who is affected by war beyond the traditional focus on our troops, the enemy combatants, and even their immediate families. The U.S. anti-war movement has already attempted to force the public to acknowledge a wider view through its slogans like "Money for Jobs, Healthcare, and Education, not War and Occupation" - but a bias towards placing our own male soldiers at the center of analysis, to the exclusion of those whose interests might conflict, persists.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



As hinted above, one direction of analysis that has not been sufficiently addressed, are the connections between imperialism, violent masculinity, and rape culture. U.S. Congress was well aware of brutal gang rapes of women in Abu Ghraib concurrent to the scandal involving Lyddie England - the anti-war movement should have been, too, since reports were available from international press. However, the treatment of female detainees never became a public scandal or issue. Would the behavior of male troops have been too divisive for the anti-war movement to bring up - or was it simply taken for granted as business as usual? If activists were afraid of making our boys look bad, surely the problem could have been tackled in the same manner that the movement responded to the scape-goating of low-level personnel for torture - by trying to implicate the full system, not just the behavior of individual actors.

Feminists have pointed out how the military nurtures a culture of sexual violence and misogyny linked to the abuse of women in occupied countries and countries with U.S. bases - as well as the abuse of women in U.S. prisons, and the high rates of rape in U.S. cities with military bases. Phoebe Jones of Global Women's Strike and Survivors Take Action Against Abuse by Military Personnel (STAAAMP) explains: "It's all connected... You have prison guards here, like Charles Grainer [implicated in the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal], who go to Iraq and abuse people there. Then you have soldiers come back from Iraq or Afghanistan getting jobs as prison guards, and they rape and abuse people. The military could stop it if they want to, but they don't want to. They're socializing men into doing this." Prison torture in Abu Ghraib was outsourced to U.S. companies using personnel from domestic prisons. Of course, outside the prison-military complex which Jones begins to outline, the impact of rape culture nurtured by the military can be traced through U.S. society further.

Another political direction that the anti-war movement has not fully pursued are the gendered economic effects of imperialism not just for Iraqi women, but poor U.S. women. Again, even as our soldiers are valorized for making the deepest sacrifices, the casualties of war extend much further, and poor U.S. women bear the brunt of war's economic costs. For instance, in Massachusetts, most Medicaid recipients, graduates of state and community colleges, welfare and subsidized childcare recipients, are women - and all these programs are facing budget cuts. Most families living in poverty are headed by single mothers. In addition to slogans such as "Support Our Troops, Bring Them Home," perhaps anti-war activists should consider the importance of Global Woman's Strike's call to "Invest in Caring, not Killing." This latter slogan critiques social service cuts and patriarchy's undervaluing of women's labor.

Perhaps the anti-war movement thinks it more convenient to ignore the conflicted and not clear-cut plight of Iraqi women - where a less-than-ideal resistance are not necessarily their saviors, imperialists not their only enemy. But the anti-war movement must skillfully address this complexity, because the conundrum of humanitarian justification for imperialism will surely recur. Maybe anti-war activists feel it is more timely to focus on arguments likely to appeal easily to our patriarchal culture - focusing discourse on caring for our troops. Eventually, the occupation will become militarily and economically

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



untenable, and our troops will be withdrawn. But will this mean the death of imperialism, in terms of both its domestic and foreign effects? As a social movement, anti-war activists have an important ideological role - in expanding social consciousness, regardless of the difficulties of countering dominant assumptions. We must expand our analysis to address the connections between U.S. patriarchy and imperialism, because doing so will help counter imperial feminist myths which validate military intervention by assuming the U.S. is the pinnacle of feminist liberation. Above I have barely scratched the surface of implicating U.S. patriarchy with imperialism - but I have attempted to show how these connections do not merely exist in terms of ideological reinforcement, but also in terms of the real, sexual, and material conditions of people's lives. We must raise awareness of the whole beast.

A last note to anti-war feminists. Let's revitalize feminism at the local, grassroots level, and fight to have our voices heard in public space. Meredith Tax writes to those feminists who would rest easy on their 1970s gains: "We may be everywhere, but to be everywhere is to be nowhere if it means nobody can find you." [45]

43 "Building Women's Movement Beyond 'Imperial Feminism,'"

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/032800-103.htm>

44 Arundhati Roy in "The Algebra of Infinite Justice"

45 in *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict 1880-1917*, p. xix.

Huibin Amee Chew, 22, is a recent graduate from Harvard University, formerly a member of the Harvard Initiative for Peace and Justice (HIPJ) and Progressive Student Labor Movement (PSLM). She is part of the newly formed Coalition for an Anti-Sexist Harvard, which is launching a campaign for free childcare for all there and staged the protests against Larry Summers.

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<http://rwor.org/a/038/us-occupation-iraqi-women.htm>

What the US occupation has meant for Iraqi women

27 February 2005. A World to Win News Service. Somebody's knocking at the door! Who is it? If we don't open up, they'll break in! Is it American soldiers? They raid homes and terrorize children and the whole family. We've seen it on TV. They insult, beat and arrest the men...

"In Fallujah many women were killed. Seventy-two women were killed the same way, shot once in the head, and their only sin was they opened the door to their homes", said a witness at the International Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul. But the men at the door might be just common thugs and criminals who

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



break in and rape the women. None of this was common before the US invasion. An Iraqi woman at the Tribunal testified that from the day that Iraq was invaded, there has been growing violence against women and systematic denial of their rights. They have been kidnapped, raped and even hunted to be traded to foreign countries for the vast global prostitution network. An Iraqi woman told a journalist, "Kidnapping and raping women has become so widespread that every woman worries that she may become the next victim. Very few women are seen on the streets. It was not like that before the war, no! Many are frightened to step out of their home."

Since the invasion, especially in the southern city of Basra governed by US and British-backed Shia clerics, women have been pressured to cover their heads. Barbers have been warned not to shave men, and tailors have been told how women must be dressed. So many women have been driven out of their jobs, especially young women, that now only 10 percent work. "Honour killings" are increasing at an alarming rate all over Iraq, even in Kurdistan.

After last year's approval of the new constitution and the establishment of an Islamic regime based on Sharia (religious law), the kind of things that were happening to Iraqi women in day to day life became enshrined in law.

Rest of the text:

Now Islamic forces are dominating the lives of Iraqi women. A traveller from Afghanistan would rub their eyes, thinking that they hadn't gone anywhere at all – that's how much life for women in Iraq is coming to resemble what has been happening to Afghanistani women. In fact, the same US that claims to have "liberated" the women of Afghanistan is now very busy "liberating" Iraqi women in the same way.

The invaders' "liberation" of Iraqi women has at least three dimensions. One is economic: most people have suffered from the invasion but women have been the worst affected. The second dimension is represented by the atrocities committed by the invaders in order to humiliate and crush the spirit of the people. Again, the whole people of Iraq have been suffering, but women have paid especially dearly. And the third dimension is the demolition of women's rights by an Islamic regime that is increasingly dominating the political scene of Iraq – thanks to the US/UK invasion.

What is so painful is that this all-around oppression of women will not end here. It will also have a huge impact on the way of life of the Iraqi people as a whole and help to consolidate backward social relations within the society.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Women the hardest-hit victims of the war on Iraq: The economic dimension

The economic sanctions imposed by the Western powers after the first invasion of Iraq in 1991 were a foretaste of the blows that would be inflicted on Iraqi women by the 2003 invasion.

According to BBC, the number of women dying of complications of pregnancy and childbirth has tripled since 1990. Figures for miscarriages jumped, partly due to war-related stress and exposure to the chemical and depleted uranium weapons used by the US. Today 65 per cent of Iraqi women give birth at home.

After the eight-year war with Iran that caused the death of half a million people in the 1980s, women came under pressure, since they were the only source of incomes in many families. This situation worsened considerably after 1991. Many government jobs paid so little that men quit, but women had to stay on since they had no alternative. Women working on farms were paid half of the already low wages. The economic situation overall became so bad that even some better-off families had to sell household appliances such as washing machines and freezers to offset their daily expenses. This increased women's burden at home. And their desperation for a job reduced their wages to half that of men. When it came to educational expenses, families had to decide which one of their children should go to school. Usually, girls were not chosen.

US atrocities against women

In December 2003 a women prisoner at Abu Ghraib smuggled out a note. "The note claimed that US guards had been raping women detainees... Several of the women were now pregnant, it added. The women had been forced to strip naked in front of men, it said. The note urged the Iraqi resistance to bomb the jail to spare the women further shame". Female lawyers of women detainees discovered that this was true not only at Abu Ghraib but that the same thing was "happening all across Iraq". (This and subsequent quotes from the UK Guardian, 20 March 2004)

Since many women find it hard to talk about what happened to them, a woman lawyer named Swadi who had taken up several women's cases visited a US military base at al-Kharkh. She talked to a female prisoner there. "She was crying. She told us she had been raped - several American soldiers had raped her. She had tried to fight them off and they had hurt her arm. She showed us the stitches. She told us, 'We have daughters and husbands. For God's sake don't tell anyone about this'."

The Guardian continued, "Astonishingly, the secret inquiry launched by the US military in January 2005, headed by Major General Antonio Taguba, has confirmed that the letter smuggled out of Abu Ghraib by a woman known only as 'Noor' was entirely and devastatingly accurate."

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Some of the 1,800 photos American guards took at Abu Ghraib show a US military policeman "having sex with an Iraqi woman", according to Taguba's report. Taguba also confirmed that guards videotaped and photographed naked female detainees. Although the Bush administration prevented the release of all these photos, some of these previously secret pictures of women were shown and placed on the Web by an Australian television station that obtained a copy of a CD made by the guards. When US soldiers arrest and imprison women accused of prostitution, this seems to be a licence for further sexual abuse.

Professor Huda Shaker al-Nuaimi, a political scientist at Baghdad University, said, "We believe she (Noor) was raped and that she was made pregnant by a US guard. After her release from Abu Ghraib, I went to her house. The neighbours said her family had moved away. I believe she has been killed." That has been the fate of at least several other women ex-prisoners. Since in Islamic societies rape is considered a dishonour staining the woman and her family, few women talk about what they experienced while in US jails and detention camps.

According to the same report, other sorts of humiliation of women for the amusement of their captors are also common in these prisons. "An Iraqi woman in her 70s had been harnessed and ridden like a donkey at Abu Ghraib and another coalition detention centre after being arrested last July", the report revealed. UK Labour MP Ann Clwyd, who investigated the case, found this to be true. Women, like men prisoners, are kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. Family members who frequently gathered in front of Abu Ghraib and other prisons say that many women have committed suicide.

There is reason to believe this abuse is still going on. When the lawyer Swadi tried to visit women at Abu Ghraib recently, American guards refused to let her in. When she complained, they threatened to arrest her.

The US-sponsored rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Iraq

After the overthrow of King Faisal by General Qassim in 1959, Iraq adopted a relatively secular constitution compared to many countries in the Middle East. Saddam Hussein accepted it when he came to power. Women were legally equal to men. They were guaranteed education up to the primary level. They had a right to divorce, and polygamy was made impossible in practical terms. Women had the right to vote and stand for public office. They had the right to wear what they wanted.

These laws relating to women's rights started to crumble after the first Gulf War, when the US tried to isolate Saddam and at the same time began courting and promoting Shia Islamic groups. Saddam also felt compelled to appeal to religious sentiments to get the support of clerics and tribal leaders. He allowed men to take up to four wives, and kill them without punishment if they were suspected of infidelity.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



After the 2003 invasion and the overthrow of Saddam, as the US began close cooperation with Shia and some Sunni Islamic political parties, Islamists took increasing control over people's daily lives. Again, women were the first to suffer from these developments.

This situation developed most quickly in predominantly Shia areas such as Basra in southern Iraq. Women were forced to wear an Islamic hejab (head covering). Those who refused risked harassment and even kidnapping and rape. Nowadays in Basra it is unusual for a woman to go out without a veil. A woman activist told the Guardian newspaper that religious pressure groups mainly related to the Shia fundamentalist parties go to schools, take over classrooms and make all the girls put on veils and even gloves. Women have not been left alone in the universities either. Many young women students feel it is unsafe not to wear a veil. More than a dozen cultural and religious associations have emerged on the campuses in the last two years. Incidents of intimidation by classmates connected to Shia parties and militias are increasing. In one of these incidents at Basra University, militiamen attacked and reportedly killed at least two women students.

The point is that the hejab is only the beginning of severe oppression for women. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini started out attacking women's rights by making the hejab compulsory. The hejab is a sign of subjugation and in turn brings a series of further forms of subjugation. It degrades women. Not letting women dress normally is a sign that they will not be permitted to do other normal things. The very purpose of the hejab is to limit women's participation in society and keep them at home. This has numerous psychological consequences for women and a devastating impact on their relationship with society.

Iraqi women and even single men increasingly find themselves unable to become independent of their families because they cannot afford to live on their own. For both economic and security reasons, there has been a whole new phenomenon of young people returning to live with their extended families. This in turn revives the tribal relations that the constitution of 1959 had hit. During past decades the increasing number of people going to work and receiving education had weakened tribal relations. Now, under the US occupation, the trend is being reversed. This enforces and provides a more solid foundation for the harsher oppression of women. In such conditions the oldest man in the extended family can play the role of the tribal head. Men are considered the protectors of the tribe's honour and can decide the fate of any girl in the extended family. When tribal relations are strong and take new forms in the cities, then tribal chiefs can refuse to accept civil laws if they contradict their traditional law. Even if the law allows women some freedoms or the men of the family agree to them, the tribal rulers won't allow it.

Legalized oppression of women: the new constitution

Iraq's new constitution finalized the establishment of an Islamic regime. It regulates important issues, including women's rights.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Article 2 of the final version of the constitution makes Islam the official religion of Iraq and its state and makes it clear that no law can be passed to contradict it. Article 14 of the final constitution guarantees equal rights for women as long as those rights do not "violate Sharia" (Islamic law). The new constitution of Iraq also guarantees all rights in "international treaties and conventions as long as they do not contradict Islam". So Sharia comes first. Of course, religious law does contradict women's rights and human rights on many points, and in all those cases women's rights are denied explicitly.

According to Sharia, only fathers can have custody of children in case of divorce. Women are officially valued at only half the worth of men in matters such as inheritance and bearing witness in court. How exactly Sharia is going to be applied depends on the government, judges and of course the clerics. But it is obvious that women have already lost many basic rights, and others such as education, health, employment and so on are under serious threat.

The evolution of this situation is important to note. When Abdul Aziz Hakim (the leader of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq) was chairing the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), there was an attempt to insert Sharia into family law, namely article 137. This article sought to make family law conform to Islamic law and limit women's rights. The council approved it in December 2003. This article provoked much controversy in different circles, including within the council itself. But it was not declared law because the then US overseer of Iraq Paul Bremer ultimately did not sign it. The US did not see it in its interest to approve the law at that time, perhaps because it was only a temporary law, and they felt that it was not worth facing the criticism of many women and even some of the forces supporting the US invasion, such as the Kurdish leaders.

But in January 2005 when the Shia parties won the election, once again they started to push for a new constitution based on Sharia. They wanted religious courts to handle marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance cases. Some even sought the constitutional recognition of tribal justice. There was a long debate about the wording on the role of Islam. The Shia Islamic parties who dominate the Iraqi government proposed that Islam be labelled "the" main source of Iraqi law, while those opposed, like the Kurds and other minorities, wanted the constitution to call Islam "a" main source of law.

In short, both factions wanted Islam to have a main role in the constitution. However after a few US-imposed deadlines were missed due to a political stalemate between the factions, finally the US intervened directly. Kurdish and Sunni negotiators later revealed that US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad suggested calling Islam "a primary source" of law, which basically supported the most extreme religious view and severely undercut women's rights. The clear US support for the Shia fundamentalists provoked and embarrassed even many who had supported the US invasion.

In order to hide this trampling on women's rights, the constitution guarantees women 25 percent of the seats in parliament. But this is merely for show. The bitter reality is that no matter how many women are in Iraq's parliament, with the new constitution in force the new generation of women in

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Iraq is even more oppressed than the last. The US invasion is responsible for this situation. Although these religious fundamentalists certainly reflect real social relations and have a social base, they were put into power by American guns. In the end, it is the US who dictates to them and not the other way around.

The US "helped midwife an Islamic state in Iraq", approvingly wrote Isabel Coleman, a Senior Fellow and Director of the Women and US Foreign Policy Programme at the Council on Foreign Relations in the unofficial US ruling class theoretical journal *Foreign Affairs* for January/February 2006. She calls for more of the same across the Islamic world. Under US sponsorship, some of the "experts on women" involved in writing the new constitution for the US-occupied Islamic Republic of Afghanistan also helped write the new constitution for the budding Islamic republic of Iraq.

US support for fundamentalist Shias is not support for the majority of the population and it is not a policy adopted as a way out of the stalemate that has seized the Iraqi government. Male supremacist Islamic traditions are being used to revitalize the tribal and feudal relations that the US needs to give their occupation a more solid base. Limiting women's rights and increasing women's oppression strengthens the backward feudal and tribal petty tyrants who are the main allies of the US imperialists in Iraq. The experience of Afghanistan and the US' alliance with the most reactionary feudals and warlords in that country give a rough idea of what path the US is taking – one that clashes increasingly sharply with the most basic interests of women and the people as a whole.

Killing democracy in Iraq

Naomi Klein and Haifa Zangana

January 2005

Red Pepper invited Naomi Klein and Haifa Zangana to discuss the current situation in Iraq and its implications for the anti-war movement

Red Pepper: Haifa, when Sami Ramadani wrote in *Red Pepper* about the resistance earlier this year ('Avoiding Vietnam in Iraq', July 2004), he stressed the significance of the Iraqi National Foundation Congress (INFC). What role does it play now?

Haifa Zangana: All strands of Iraqi society are in the INFC: Arab nationalists, Kurdish, Turkomen, Sunni and Shiites and a women's group. Within it are a group of Muslim clerics who've been key in the negotiations over the kidnappings.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



My understanding, although it doesn't admit it, is that the congress is the political wing of the armed resistance. It's developed over the last six months, organising solidarity campaigns with Najaf or Sadr City, issuing combined statements. On the eve of Falluja it published an appeal to UN general-secretary Kofi Annan demanding an end to the attack on the city, the release of political prisoners and a withdrawal of troops to areas outside the city. In October it said it would not participate in the elections.

But there are, of course, other ways of resisting and opposing the occupation than just armed resistance. There are peaceful activities, as well: demonstrations, meetings, poetry, articles being written.

Naomi Klein: All these different forms of resistance – poetry, newspapers, sermons, non-violent protests – have been systematically shut down by the occupation. Culture has been stamped out, newspapers are being closed, protests are being fired on, and the only form of resistance left is the armed resistance.

HZ: Just taking your child to school, risking your life and their lives by just stepping out of your house, is a form of resistance. There's a daily struggle to achieve just the ordinary things of life: electricity, water, food, taking your child to hospital.

Iraq is a very rich country – we're sitting on oil, breathing oil – where there are women doctors and engineers qualified to work. If they want to work, however, they have to have a permit signed by a member of the political parties appointed by the Americans.

At the end of September the Americans announced the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative, \$10m, launched by Colin Powell. It is for the period up to the elections. The money will not go to Iraq; it will be spent on American management agencies, and will concentrate on a few women being taught self-assertiveness, leadership, and all talking about creating a new Iraq. What happened to the old Iraq?

NK: They're using feminism and women's issues to advance the occupation in a really dangerous way, because they are sullyng the reputation of women's issues, which could be seized upon by anti-women forces in Iraq. It is easy then to say, 'if you are advocating women's rights, you're for the occupation'.

You could hear how people talked about Moqtada Sadr when I arrived. Support for him at that time was 7 or 8 per cent. But the more he was attacked, the more support grew for him, for a religious state. Combine decreasing support for secularism with the Americans marketing feminism: it's not only a disastrous recipe for women: it's a disastrous strategy against women.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



HZ: Yes, they come with millions of dollars, while Iraqi women struggle for the most basic services and goods.

I don't care about programmes for democracy because democracy is coming back like a joke. If you want to say a bad word about someone, you say they're democratic. What Bush and Blair have achieved in the occupation is they've killed democracy.

NK: Falluja's always called the Ba'athist hold-out, as though it has been against the occupation from the beginning. But in April 2003 parents were holding a peaceful demonstration against their school being occupied by US soldiers. Instead of treating them as peaceful demonstrators, listening to their demands and negotiating, the soldiers shot at them and killed 13 and wounded 75. That's been repeated hundreds of times.

RP: Naomi, what do you think are the implications of all this for the anti-war movement?

NK: The anti-war movement has been extremely remiss in not supporting and defending democratic resistance in Iraq. We've not been there supporting their demands and expressing outrage. We could have made a difference if we'd echoed calls for direct elections in January. Now it's a total obscenity to support elections that are being bombed into being. But in January there were 100,000 people on the streets of Baghdad calling for elections, and where were we?

Attacks on journalists are ongoing. Western journalists should be screaming blue murder at the treatment of Al-Jazeera.

HZ: And at themselves! They were embedded in Falluja, so they could not report.

NK: There should be a ban on embedding. If you look at the kidnapping of journalists, whenever someone is kidnapped and released they tell the same story: 'They thought I was a spy. They checked, found I wasn't and I was released.'

But it's not just journalists who've been embedded: it's those working for the NGOs. Society is being destroyed by the embedded journalist and the NGOs. What's the difference between a spy and an embedded journalist? It's certainly confusing if you're a Western journalist and are dressed like a soldier... Destroying the lines between combatants and journalists and aid workers has embedded what is called 'civil society' into part of the war machine.

If it's a serious anti-war movement it has to fight wars as they are being fought, and we have to move from slogans to demands. In November the Paris club [of creditor nations] signed a deal locking Iraq into a structural adjustment programme until 2008. A country under siege can't fight that. First, it's

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



not happening in Iraq; it's happening in Europe. Second, the point of doing this in a war is that you can't fight it. This is a straightforward opportunity for clear international solidarity in line with the principles of defending the rights to national self-determination. Our responsibility is to save space for Iraqis to decide for themselves, which can't happen if they inherit a \$200 billion debt, with no reparations and all reconstruction money already spent.

There needs to be a programme, developed inside and outside Iraq. We need to deepen our discussion of what democracy means because they have taken this word 'democracy' and, as Haifa says, made it into a dirty word. Arundhati Roy talked of [the US] bombing Afghanistan with butter. Here they are bombing [the country] with ballots: literally, the election as a weapon of war.

HZ: The anti-war movement needs a real programme, not just a reaction to when the Americans launch another attack. Iraqis are defending themselves and opposing the occupation in various ways, and are facing a period of 20 years or longer of occupation.

It'll be another 20 or 30 years of struggle for complete independence. The question is: what sort of relationship will there be between the anti-war movement and the Iraqi resistance?

RP: How important are the anti-war campaigns run by relatives of coalition soldiers?

NK: This is a difficult thing to say, but it's important that America brings in the draft. It doesn't have sufficient numbers of troops to continue the occupation, and you see this the way it's shifting forces around the country.

There's presently a poverty draft in the US. People treated as disposable in the culture, the poor, those shut out of education, immigrants without a green card and who need to join up to get immigration status, are these who are dying. The elite of the country doesn't know anyone in Iraq. A draft brings the war into the living rooms of the nation.

It makes it more important for other coalition countries to get their troops out. A dozen countries have pulled or are pulling their troops out. A strategy for the anti-war movement must be to try and break the rest of the coalition. It's important that we isolate the US. It's their unilateralist policy and they shouldn't be able to spread it around.

There should also be a campaign against mercenary soldiers, which is the other way the US is insulated from the draft.

HZ: It's important, too, to be emphasising and linking the campaigns on depleted uranium and Gulf War Syndrome. They are indiscriminate in their effects on both occupiers and occupied.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



And I think the impeachment process is important. We should support the World Tribunal on Iraq. Politicians have to be made to be accountable.

NK: Using the language of morality we have to speak about the real victims of war. In the US elections we were unable to speak about Iraqi victims: Abu Ghraib or Sadr City. The language of faith was not answered by the language of morality. It concerns me that many important progressives in the US focus on the fact that the elections were stolen. Well maybe, but if Bush won – why? The electoral system is, of course, ridiculously opaque.

HZ: Well, if you think that about the US, wait for the January elections in Iraq.

www.nologo.org

haifa_zangana@yahoo.co.uk

Thanks to Jane Shallice

Iraq: Women's rights pushed back

Sunday, October 23 2005

THE INVASION and occupation of Iraq has resulted in the deaths and suffering of millions of ordinary Iraqis. Among these are the increasing attacks on women's lives, their rights and conditions.

By Jane James, Socialist Party

The increase in rape and physical violence towards women by men known to them and strangers is a typical result of war everywhere, made worse in Iraq by the collapse of society following the invasion. Women and girls have also been kidnapped, raped and killed by gangs in a lawless environment.

While criticism has been raised about the proposed constitution's reference to using Islamic law to further oppress women, the truth is that this is already a reality for many women and girls in Iraq today.

In Baghdad and the Sunni Triangle the reactionary nature of the Sunni Islamist insurgent forces is forcing women and girls to wear the veil, using physical and acid attacks to enforce this.

The dominant Shia forces who want to create a form of Islamist state in Iraq are also imposing strict religious dress codes on women and denying them rights.

Fear of violence from the occupation and insurgency combined with the oppressive reactionary

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Islamists are forcing many women to give up their jobs and schooling. Thousands of female university students have already given up their studies.

Iraqi women in prison often experience torture and sexual abuse. The American Civil Liberties Union have reported more than a dozen cases of rape and abuse of detainees.

In fear of family honour killings (where women are killed by male members of the family if they are accused of immoral behaviour) more women are having dangerous backstreet abortions. This reflects the growing forced Islamicisation of Iraqi life.

Amnesty International says it "is concerned that interpretations of Islamic law may be used to perpetuate discrimination against women" and have documented many cases of attacks on women.

Women are warned not to go out unveiled, or to wear make-up or to mix with men - which along with fear of daily violence from the occupation and insurgency - results in women being more and more confined to their homes.

Haifa Zangara describes the daily struggle of women to obtain fuel, food and medication. "For most women, simply to venture onto the street is to risk being attacked or kidnapped for profit or revenge."

New constitution

Women's groups in Iraq have consistently been demanding and campaigning for the new constitution to recognise the full equality of women. In July, 200 women activists bravely demonstrated in Baghdad against the lack of rights for women in the constitution.

With the constitution being put to a referendum, have their concerns been met?

The introduction of the constitution promises to "pay attention to women and their rights" and Article 14 states that "Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination because of sex, ethnicity, nationality, origin, colour, religion, sect, belief, opinion or social economic status."

However, Article 2 states: "Islam is the official religion of the state and is a basic source of legislation" and Article 90 (2nd) says: "The Supreme Federal Court will be made up of a number of judges and experts in Sharia (Islamic Law) and law."

Some Islamists wanted Islam to be the main source of legislation but the wording of the constitution describing Islam as a basic source of legislation is only a question of degree.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Even if the constitution is interpreted liberally, then the reality on the ground is leading to increasing clampdown on women's rights.

Houzan Mahmoud (head of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq), explains that the drafting committee of the constitution is dominated by religious, ethnic and tribal figures. She protests that "neither the US nor the Islamists are our liberators."

Mitchell Prothero, a journalist based in Lebanon, blames the "religious and ethnic power grab" in Iraq for the worsening conditions of women. She cites areas of women's rights that will be weakened under the new constitution: divorce without husband's consent, custody of older male children, inheritance rights and not being equal to men in the eyes of the law.

Women make up 60% of Iraqi society yet only 33% of the National Assembly are women and 17% of the Constitutional Committee - which played the main role in drawing up the constitution. Many of these women do the bidding of US imperialism or the dominant ethnic/religious groups.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom quote a former CIA official, Reuel Gerecht, who said that "women's social rights are not critical to the evolution of democracy."

One female rights activist has said: "America will tolerate any conclusion so they can leave, even if it means destroying women's rights and civil liberties. They have left us a regime like the Taliban."

Deterioration

From the 1970 Iraqi constitution till the 1990s family law in Iraq was relatively progressive, particularly compared to other countries in the Middle East. The Iraqi constitution declared all women and men equal before the law.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a period of economic growth, more women became educated and went to work. In the 1990s Saddam started to bring Islamic elements into the legal system, education and the personal status code - which included the admissibility of polygamy (where men can have more than one wife.)

The 1990s saw their status decline further due to Saddam's policies, war and sanctions. Now we are witnessing a further deterioration in women's rights and conditions due to the occupation and to the rise of ethnic, tribal and right-wing political Islamist groups.

Women's groups and campaigners are risking great danger in describing the conditions of women in Iraq today and campaigning against these attacks.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The Socialist Party argues that it is necessary in Iraq to build mass, democratic organisations of the working class, with a programme in the interests of ordinary Iraqi workers, urban and rural poor.

Such a political programme would challenge the role of imperialism, capitalism and reactionary political Islam. Integral to such a programme must be demands for the reinstatement and improvement of women's rights.

3-13-06

Why the War is Sexist (And Why We Can't Ignore Gender Anymore)

By Huibin Ameer Chew

Huibin Ameer Chew graduated with a degree in Women's Studies and Social Studies from Harvard College in 2004. As a student, she was active in anti-war and student-labor solidarity organizing, but became increasingly aware of the lack of an outlet for her feminist consciousness in her anti-war work. She now works for the Chinese Progressive Association, a community organization in Boston, Chinatown, and is a founding member of the Coalition to Defend Reproductive Rights. Through education and direct action such as clinic defense, the Coalition to Defend Reproductive Rights seeks to organize around the lack of access to safe reproductive healthcare. The following article was prepared in connection with a conference sponsored by Historians Against the War in February at the University of Texas, Austin.

“Our sons made the ultimate sacrifice, and we want answers” – Cindy Sheehan on truthout.org

“Nice puss – bad foot” – Caption under the photo of an Iraqi woman whose leg was destroyed by a landmine, on a website allowing soldiers to swap pictures of dead Iraqis for free access to pornography

Refusing to be silenced as a military parent, Cindy Sheehan's courageous voice has lent new urgency to stopping the war in Iraq. “Mother Cindy” has been likened to a Rosa Parks of the anti-war movement. Both widely recognized women served as symbolic figures to help bring the weight of a larger base of organizing to bear on the public.

Yet today we have an anti-war movement which largely fails to point out connections between war, and U.S. patriarchy or gendered domestic inequalities. To galvanize organizing against militarism to its full potential, we must question its gender-blind approach. In fact, Sheehan came as a surprise to segments of the movement which prioritized looking to the troops and potential recruits as *the* centers of resistance. Sheehan and Hurricane Katrina remind us that as the war's effects are much broader, we can expect and should look to support rebellion from a variety of mutually reinforcing fronts.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



What would it mean to put not just Cindy's son at the center of outrage, but women like Sheehan herself, as military mothers, wives, and partners? How have these women themselves, not just the troops, been militarized, manipulated, and exploited? What would it mean for the anti-war movement to interpret women like Sheehan as activists and agents fighting against exploitation which *directly* affects them in their own right – not just as stand-ins for others' struggles, defined by a male-dominated left?

Below is a numbered list of suggestions for how to apply a gender analysis to the war – how to understand its links with U.S. patriarchy. Like lists enumerating “Why the War is Racist” which have circulated in the U.S., the below reasons get at why the war must be understood as sexist. This list is a start, by no means meant to be exhaustive, at offering a wider understanding of who is hurt by imperialism.

- **Soldiers are not the only – or main – casualties of war.**

The ideology of militarism glorifies soldiers, focusing our attention on their heroism and sacrifice. The U.S. anti-war movement has largely not escaped this soldier-centered paradigm – causing a gender bias in who it recognizes as ultimately suffering from war.

In the 20 th century, 90 percent of all war deaths have been of unarmed women, children, and men. As the occupation wears on, more and more Iraqi women and girls are killed – reported as “collateral damage.” Bombs and modern war weapons murder and maim noncombatant women in approximately equal numbers to noncombatant men – even if from the U.S. perspective, men make up the vast majority of our war dead. Soldiers are not those primarily losing their lives in this occupation. At the same time, note that U.S. imperialism benefits from certain strategies that maximize “collateral damage” (such as using long-distance, high tech weapons rather than infantry), because these also minimize our own soldiers' deaths and the potential public relations blowup. The tendency to devalue the enemies' lives is reinforced by not only racist but also sexist ideologies – history is made by “our boys,” and enemy females' deaths are not even acknowledged.

Putting U.S. soldiers' deaths abroad in the context of other wartime deaths occurring at home causes another shift in perspective. For example, during World War II, U.S. industrial workers were more likely than U.S. soldiers to die or be injured. Historian Catherine Lutz observes, “The female civilians who worked on bases or in war industries can be seen as no less guardians or risk-takers than people in uniform.”¹ This is not to downplay the amount of suffering and exploitation soldiers are forced to endure, but to widen our scope of who we recognize as affected in war.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



- **The economic harms of war are exacerbated by patriarchy for women – both within the U.S. and in Iraq.**

With the destruction of Iraq's economy, women and girls have suffered especially from deprivations. In the article, "Occupation is Not (Women's) Liberation: Confronting 'Imperial Feminism' and Building a Feminist Anti-War Movement," I discuss in detail some gendered ways Iraqi women and girls disproportionately bear certain effects of the country's economic collapse – from unemployment to the dramatic drop in female literacy.

In the U.S., poor women bear the brunt of public service cuts. In Massachusetts, for example, most Medicaid recipients, graduates of state and community colleges, welfare and subsidized childcare recipients, are women – and all these programs have faced budget slashes. Most families living in poverty are headed by single mothers.

Furthermore, imperialism helps to intensify and increase *unpaid* labor that is performed by women in their traditional gender roles. Childcare, healthcare, homemaking all become heavier without public sector aid – whether due to economic collapse in occupied lands, or imperialist austerity in the aggressor nation. For instance, as hospitals are destroyed or become unavailable, women in both Iraq and the U.S. disproportionately shoulder responsibility for their families' healthcare. As schools close or childcare becomes unaffordable, women are strained with extra work watching children. Alarmingly, industrialized nations plan to impose IMF Structural Adjustment Programs on Iraq because of its sovereign debt. Feminist scholars have documented how SAPs have disproportionately harmed Third World *women* across the globe in terms of health, education, and overwork.

U.S. women from military families, and wives of government contractors, are saddled with the unpaid task of holding the family together until their spouse returns. As the heads of single-parent households, these women take increased responsibility for homemaking and childcare, on top of their jobs. One brother of a serviceman put it: "Soldiers may enlist, but their families are *drafted*."

That the military *depends* on such women to figuratively "oil its machinery" by maintaining troop morale is evidenced by its creation of "support groups" for military wives, even while it simultaneously lengthens troop deployments to cope with overstretch. Rather than being dismissed as a mere service for needy women, these support groups should be seen as an attempt to strategically harness and propel women's labor – including their performance of correct, sexually loyal roles – that the troops' emotional functioning and lack of rebellion partly relies upon.² Bluntly, the Pentagon is responding to its post-invasion recruitment shortage by drawing on reserves, increasing deployments – *and* laying the economic, emotional strain on women of military families. These 'support groups' are a cheap alleviation for structural oppression and exploitation, in the larger context of imperialism's priorities.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



At the same time, our government's distorted agenda, sharpened in this period of outright military aggression, harnesses and compounds economic sexism that pre-dates the Iraq war. Given U.S. history, patriarchy's operation cannot be disentangled from pre-existing structural racism either. Racist incarceration which disproportionately targets black communities intensifies black women's unpaid labor heading single households – even as women on workfare-welfare are kept out of decent jobs. Arab, South Asian, Muslim, and immigrant women are similarly strained by the detention of their partners and family members under the War on Terror.

- **Militarization intensifies the sexual commodification of women.**

Feminist anthropologists such as Cynthia Enloe have documented how the U.S. military perpetuates the sexual commodification of women around military bases both in the U.S. and abroad, to manage and motivate its largely male workforce.³ Additionally, we must analyze *collusion* between foreign and indigenous patriarchies under imperialism in exacerbating women's oppression.

Following a pattern observed across different conflict regions by feminist scholars, Iraqi women face increasing pressures to earn their subsistence from men by bartering their sexuality. This is due to a lack of other economic options under both military attack *and* oppressive gender relations. In Baghdad, prostitution reportedly became widespread between the fall of the Hussein administration in April 2003 and November 2003, as women disproportionately suffered growing poverty.⁴ Today, reports have surfaced of young Iraqi teens working in Syrian brothels, after being displaced from Fallujah where U.S. forces launched brutal offensives and chemical weapons attacks on civilians. Sexual violence, as well as the trafficking of Iraqi women and girls, showed horrific rises almost immediately after the invasion and continue. While initially perpetrated largely by Iraqi men,⁵ these rapes and abductions were exacerbated by the occupation force's negligence and inability to establish security – its priorities, after all, have been to secure the oil.

The U.S. anti-war left was in general embarrassingly unsure how to address such violence, inconveniently at the hands of Iraqis rather than U.S. forces – let alone suggest an adequate remedy which might have direct effects on the problem, besides calls for a (male-led) resistance to replace the occupiers. But an understanding of the gender dynamics typical of wartime economies would press the need to provide solidarity for Iraqi anti-occupation movements for women's rights. The U.S. anti-war movement largely has not treated freedom from sexual violence as a human right equal to Iraqi struggles for food, water, shelter, or healthcare. Meanwhile, as the occupation persists, with growing contact between military forces and Iraqi civilians, sexual brutality by both U.S. troops and Iraqi police under occupation authority has increased.

Jennifer Fasulo is co-founder of Solidarity with Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (SOWFI), a U.S.-based group providing political support to an anti-occupation, feminist women's group in Iraq. She reminds us of the specific historical and geopolitical context of the occupation, pointing out that

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



the conflict has intensified the growing religious fundamentalist movement in Iraq – opposed by Iraqi feminists and socialists – including segments that systematically perpetrate violence against and harassment of women. The rise of Islamist fundamentalism throughout the Middle East is not merely indigenous, but has its roots in U.S. support, which recruited and imported Islamist militias as opposition to secular, democratic and socialist movements throughout earlier decades.

- **Militarization helps perpetuate sexual violence, domestic violence, and violence against women – both in the U.S. and Iraq.**

Even though women serve as soldiers, the U.S. military is a misogynist, homophobic institution that relies on patriarchal ideologies and relations to function – with effects on larger society, as well as the countries we occupy or station bases. While the racist ideologies behind the war are regularly paid lip service by activists, we less frequently raise how this war depends on sexism. But the military and its public support are based on deeply embedded patriarchal values and practices.

The U.S. military trains men to devalue, objectify and demean traits traditionally associated with women. It molds men into a gender role of violent masculinity defined in opposition to femininity. By ‘violent masculinity’ I mean a mode of operating that glorifies violence as a solution to tension – and that is unaccountable to the feminine/civilian ‘protected’ in that the masculine/soldier ‘protectors’ are encouraged not to view these people as their equals. Feminist historian Catherine Lutz observes militarism teaches us, “we prove and regenerate ourselves through violence.”⁶

One soldier reported his training in boot camp:

“Who are you?” “Killers!”

“What do you do?” “We kill! We kill! We kill!”

Furthermore, soldiers are purposefully trained to *eroticize* violence – from a heterosexual, male-aggressor perspective, even if some soldiers are gay and some are women. For example, during the first Gulf War, Air Force pilots watched pornographic movies before bombing missions to psyche themselves up.⁷ Until 1999, hardcore pornography was available at military base commissaries, which were one of its largest purchasers.⁸

The military teaches soldiers to internalize the misogynistic role of violent masculinity, so they can function psychologically. At the 2003 Air Force Academy Prom, men were given fliers – using taxpayer dollars – which read, “You Shut the Fuck Up! We’ll Protect America. Get out of our way, you liberal pussies!” They were then treated to a play which provided instructions on how to stimulate a female’s clitoris and nipples to get her vaginal juice flowing (in case she was otherwise unwilling?).⁹

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Alarming but not so surprisingly, according to the Veterans Association itself, over 80 percent of recent women veterans report experiencing sexual harassment, and 30 percent rape or attempted rape, by other military personnel.¹⁰ Crimes of sexual violence by military personnel are shocking – and institutionally ignored. Over the course of several years, a two-year-old girl was repeatedly raped by her Air Force father, who also invited his fellow servicemen to gang rape her. Eventually, he was simply allowed to retire; today, a decade later, he receives a pension and is fighting to claim his daughter’s custody.¹¹ Lawyer Dorothy Mackey of Survivors Take Action Against Abuse by Military Personnel (STAMP) reports that of the 4,300 sexual assault and abuse cases she is handling which were brought up to military and government officials, only 3 were actually prosecuted. In Mackey’s own experience as a survivor of repeated sexual assault by military personnel, her attempt to press charges was opposed by the Department of Justice as a threat to national security.¹²

The U.S. Inspector General reported that military service is more conducive to domestic violence than any other occupation, citing the military’s authoritarianism, use of physical force in training, as well as the stress of frequent moves and separations as factors.¹³ The military’s institutional sexism and indifference to violence against women could be added! A checklist used by the military to determine if rape reports are valid lists a women’s financial problems with her partner, and “demanding” medical treatment, as factors indicating she’s lying.¹⁴ The Army recently offered the perk of free breast implants for servicewomen, so its surgeons could “get practice.” Meanwhile, it has a drastic shortage of rape kits in combat regions and refuses to pay for servicewomen’s abortions even in the case of rape.

A therapist who practices near a large Army Base and treats soldiers returning from Iraq reported escalating domestic violence ever since troops began coming back, and wife-killings in bases at an all-time high – covered up by the Army.¹⁵ She also discussed soldiers’ addictions to pornography, cultivated over their service, as a source of sexual selfishness and abuse towards their partners. Pornography trained the soldiers to use women’s bodies as masturbatory devices.

Militarism’s patriarchal roles extend into larger culture, not just ideologically in terms of how little boys broadly are taught to be soldiers – but institutionally, as well. Phoebe Jones of Global Women’s Strike and Survivors Take Action Against Abuse by Military Personnel (STAAAMP) places the Abu Ghraib scandal in the context of a prison-military complex of abuse:

It’s all connected... You have prison guards here, like Charles Grainer [implicated in the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal], who go to Iraq and abuse people there. Then you have soldiers come back from Iraq or Afghanistan getting jobs as prison guards, and they rape and abuse people. The military could stop it if they want to, but they don’t want to. They’re socializing men into doing this.¹⁶

Prison torture was outsourced to U.S. companies using personnel from domestic prisons. Beyond this the prison-military complex, the impact of rape culture nurtured by the military can be traced through U.S. society further. In 1997, the number one reason for veterans to be in prison at the state, federal, or

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



local level was for sexual assault.¹⁷ An exploration of the effects of militarism on socialization, and institutions from school to family, are outside the scope of this brief essay – but must be considered.

The impact of violence against women cannot be separated from racial and economic hierarchy, even though these pieces are often analyzed without reference to each other. One result of Hurricane Katrina – little responded to by the left – was the devastation of domestic violence shelters and sexual assault services. The Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence describes poor women forced to live in homeless shelters, experiencing rape and physical abuse from partners they have been unable to escape, on top of the storm's destruction.¹⁸ Of course FEMA did not provide alleviation. Yet rather than critiquing the government's patriarchal failings, the left allowed right-wing reports of abounding chaos (laced with racist undertones) to fill the gap of explaining sexual abuse. Needless to say, poor and non-white women disproportionately face a lack of recourses to gendered violence. For instance, although violence against women cuts across class, women on welfare suffer especially high rates of domestic and sexual violence – a direct result of having less freedom to leave their abusers.¹⁹ And again, government policy is involved; welfare law, purportedly to encourage 'strong' families, denies funds to poor women who leave their partners, requiring their economic dependency and endurance of abuse.

- **Militarization and war decrease women's control over their reproduction.**

Just months after the invasion, increased back alley abortions were reported in Baghdad as women lost access to healthcare and contraception. In the U.S., budget stringency means that policies like universal healthcare and free contraception on demand will appear to remain a distant realities. Since women, not men, get pregnant, the lack of reproductive healthcare *is* an issue of women's equality – affecting women's control of their labor, bodies, and futures.

Furthermore, a Christian right-wing takeover of the U.S. political scene has reframed debates over "morality" in terms of issues like abortion and gay rights – diverting outrage away from, say, the economic exploitation of this administration and its war policy, to the treatment of a clump of cells and who one loves. The Christian conservative movement focuses its political intervention more on directly controlling individuals' personal behavior, than on altering the structures of society to alleviate inequality and meet human needs. In our historical context, the ideology and agenda of limiting women's control over their reproduction is connected to U.S. imperialism – *and thus has much broader implications than strictly women's reproductive health*. For one, imperialism relies on a gendered reproductive division of labor, that trains poor men to be soldiers while valorizing motherhood for women, the better to exploit their women's paid and unpaid labor. I am unable to do a full exploration of these connections in this essay – but they demand thought and examination!

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



- **Militarization and conflict situations result in a restriction of public space for women – impacting their political expression.**

Feminist scholars have observed the physical barriers to women’s public access in conflict situations time and again. In Iraq, due to insecurity, women are restricted from seeking healthcare, attending school and work. Such limitations have shaped the trajectory and form of women’s *organizing*, as well. When the political actors are men, women’s bodies and behavior risk becoming a battleground to be fought over by others – they risk marginalization in the political sphere unless they are able to actively organize around an agenda that takes into account their gendered position.

Within the U.S., the anti-war movement’s troop-centered analysis has also shaped women’s space politically, if not necessarily physically. Military mothers like Cindy Sheehan are publicly recognized for their connection to the troops – and specifically, their stance of support for rather than conflict with individual troops. An analysis of gender which problematizes the effects of violent masculinity is less welcome.

- **Occupation will not bring women’s liberation.**

As an occupier with little accountability to the Iraqi people (or the U.S. public), the U.S. government is not capable of – or interested in – bringing democracy and liberation to Iraqis. At the very best, U.S. officials have merely “played two sides of the fence” with regard to women’s rights – bartering them away when convenient in order to maintain power. But at worst, three long years later, events have made it tragically clear in all its horrific consequences that the continued occupation’s primary goals have been the economic, political, and military interests of a U.S. elite – with as much non-transparency as possible for the sake of public relations. A lengthier discussion of the specific historical and geopolitical forces at work in the U.S. occupation of Iraq, bearing on Iraqi women’s positions, was the subject of a previous essay, “Occupation is Not (Women’s) Liberation: Confronting Imperial Feminism and Building a Feminist Anti-War Movement.”

Conclusion

Imperialism *requires* particular gender relations to function. Little boys are taught that soldiering is a rite of passage – a vehicle to manly respect. The public learns that soldiering – and now serving as security or emergency personnel – entitles a special claim to citizenship, to this country and its offerings, even if in actuality such promises do not really materialize. But that is P.R. to boost recruitment. And by valorizing the violent, masculine protector at the expense of the feminine, at the expense of women, the state and society extract women’s labor at undervalued rates, preserving a gendered division of labor at women’s expense, and reinforce male sexual entitlement. Part of the military’s appeal to (heterosexual) men, the boost to troop morale it relies on, is the male privilege it promises to offer over economically dependent, sexually available women.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The military *uses* the work of women, sectorized into patriarchal and exploitative economic relations, to function – whether as marginalized soldiers, military wives, sex workers, or civilians.

A gender analysis – a recognition of the connections between imperialism and U.S. patriarchy – drastically widens the spectrum of people we must consider the ‘casualties’ of war, and deepens our understanding of imperialism. Not only does the war perpetuate sexist inequality and patriarchy, but also it enlists patriarchal relations – economic, sexual, and ideological – to carry out its operations. I have outlined ways women are affected by the war – both as distinct from men, and disproportionately compared to men, due to gendered workings. Righting these injustices requires special attention to gender, and is not guaranteed by merely opposing the war.

We must recognize the connections between the war in Iraq and patriarchy at home – and resist.

“Americans have thousands of media outlets to choose from. But they still have to visit a porn site to see what this war has done to the bodies of the dead and the souls of the living. One of the pictures... depicts a woman whose right leg has been torn off by a land mine... a medical worker is holding the mangled stump up to the camera. The woman’s vagina is visible.. The caption for this picture reads: ‘Nice puss - bad foot.’” – About website allowing soldiers to swap pictures of dead Iraqis for free access to pornography

“There are plenty of women in Fallujah who have testified they were raped by American soldiers... They are nearby the secondary school for girls inside Fallujah. When people came back.. they found so many girls.. totally naked and.. killed.” -- Website (Click here.)

1 Homefront: A Military City and the American 20 th Century, by Catherine Lutz, p.46

2 This analysis presented by Cynthia Enloe during a talk in MIT in 2003. Enloe would count sex workers around military bases, and female military personnel, as other women enlisted, both formally and informally, by the military, to facilitate its operation.

3 In the current Iraq war, girls and teens displaced from U.S.-destroyed cities like Fallujah have been traced to the sex trade in Syria.

4 UNIFEM; <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/iraq/iraq.htm>

5 More recently, with greater contact between U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians compared to early on in the occupation, sexual violence against Iraqis perpetuated by occupying forces has increased.

6 in Homefront, by Catherine Lutz

7 Michael Rogin in “‘Make My Day!’ Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics.” Cultures of United States Imperialism. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. See also Robert Jensen in “Blow Bangs and Cluster Bombs: The Cruelty of Men and Americans,” Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography.

8 <http://www.feministpeacenet.org/MVAW.htm>

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

9 Dorothy Mackey of Survivors Take Action Against Abuse by Military Personnel, 2004 Boston Social Forum.

10 <http://www.womenagainstrape.net/Latest%20News/MackeyPaper.htm>

11 Dorothy Mackey, private communication, Aug. 9, 2005.

12 in "Rape Nation," <http://www.alternet.org/rights/19134/>

13 <http://www.feministpeacenet.org/MVAW.htm>

14 in "Rape Nation," <http://www.alternet.org/rights/19134/>

15 <http://www.quakerhouse.org/costs-of-war-01.htm>

16 in "Rape Nation," <http://www.alternet.org/rights/19134/>

17 <http://www.womenagainstrape.net/Latest%20News/MackeyPaper.htm>

18 <http://www.lcadv.org/>

19 <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/library/articles/#506>, for instance, see "Poverty, Welfare, and Battered Women: What Does the Research Tell Us?" by Eleanor Lyon

An answer to "Rise of Extremism, Islamic Law Threaten Iraqi Women"

(Dirk adriaensens, 01/04/2005)

Dear editor,

I received a reaction from a (well known) Iraqi woman, whose name I can't reveal, to your article:

Rise of Extremism, Islamic Law Threaten Iraqi Women by Chris Shumway

<http://newstandardnews.net/content/?items=1600>

"What threatens the Iraqi women now is not wearing the scarf or the hijab as much as it is the fear of being arrested, killed in blasts, shootings, or on the hands of criminal gangs.

The fear of her husband, her son, brother, father...etc being killed or arrested. there is an army of newly widowed women, with many children to feed or take care of, mothers of handicapped children with no money to provide medical care, women are living in refugees camps, with families and children to take care of.

women are in jails, humiliated, abused, with no future. women are unemployed. many are working as house servants. I agree that for a women to put the scarf against her will is unacceptable, but this is (luxury) problem when your life, your children, your house, and your existence is threatened. and by way the majority of Iraqi women put the scarf even before the invasion and the occupation. It is true that they are more now, for safety reasons, or political reasons, but let us not forget the real problem, the real injustice.

I think that this is part of blackening the image of Islam, which in turn serves the war against terrorism. Let us look at the real problem, the occupation, and the crimes against the Iraqi people (including women) it is committing, which is much bigger and more dangerous on women than the scarf. Best.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



xxxx"

In October, days before the assault on Fallujah, the OWFI released the following statement:

Communiqué of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq on:

Criminal acts committed by Islamists during the month of Ramadan against Women in Iraq and the Rejection and Resistance of Women against Islamic Terrorism.

Terrorist acts against women in Iraq by Islamic groups have increased dramatically in recent months and reached an unprecedented level under the rubric of ³observing sanctities during Ramadan.² A fascist Islamic group called ³Mujahideen Shura Group² has warned that it will kill any women who are seen on street unveiled whether by themselves or with a male companion!

In the northern city of Mosul, Christian women are targets of a killing, kidnapping and rape campaign. One such barbaric crime took place in this city where two women were kidnapped and raped by multiple men and then were sold as female slaves to another group of men. They were again raped repeatedly for four days before they managed to escape!

In the city of Falluja, at the Mujahideen congress held on October 20,2004, the Islamic criminal Abdulla al-Janabi and Falluja's Shura Council gave a fatwa (religious decree) that Mujahideen fighters should rape girls at age 10 before they are raped by Americans!

Scores of university girls have been beaten up, often severely, for wearing jeans or for not wearing hijab (Islamic veil). Women who go to hair dressing salons are frequently attacked by Islamists and their hair is cut in a public display of shaming.

Thousands of leaflets are distributed across the country everyday warning women against going out unveiled, putting on make up, shaking hands or mixing with men. More than 1000 female university students have taken leave of their studies to protect themselves against the terrorism of Islamists.

They kidnap women in the name of ³resistance² and only release them after receiving thousands of dollars in ransom for each woman! They kidnap Iraqi and foreign women alike. Margaret Hassan, a British woman known for her help and service to the Iraqi people for over three decades was taken hostage by an Islamic terrorist groups asking for millions of dollars in ransom, otherwise she will be killed like other foreigners.

Today, with the absence of any form of state in Iraq, the terrorist Islamists are seeking to implement their medieval laws through fear and horror. They have come to Iraq with slogans and banners holding signs of swords dripping blood. They are striving to Islamicize Iraqi society through terror. Everyday they are killing Christians, university academics and lecturers, secular personalities, youth, children and any other creature moving on the ground!

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



This is the benefit of the liberation that the US government has brought to the Iraqi masses. The only true benefit has come to the Islamic terrorist groups, which are free to attack, and kill women!

Women in Iraq and the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq expose these forces, which try to delude people by posing as ³resistance² to the US occupiers. *The Islamic movement has made it clear that even if the US forces are expelled or withdraw from Iraq, they will declare Jihad against any secular government!* They want to establish a Caliphate (Islamic government) where women will be set back by 1400 years! The Islamic terrorists have come with their bayonets directed at women in Iraq.

We must stand up to the groups of Islamic terrorism in Iraq. There is no other alternative.

The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq announces a local and international campaign against Islamic terrorism. OWFI strongly opposes and fights against this terrorism. We call on the masses and all women from north to south to join our campaign and stand up against the barbarism of misogynist Islamists. We call on all progressives, liberationists and defenders of women's rights and human rights, including civil rights and children's rights, to support the Organizations of Women's Freedom in Iraq in its struggle against political Islam.

Today the movement for women's rights and a civil society in Iraq stands up to oppose and end Islamic terrorism and the US occupation of Iraq. *As long as the occupation continues, Islamic terrorism against the society will flourish and grow.* Support the secular women's movement! Join our campaign against Islamic terrorism in Iraq!

Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq

October 25, 2004

Al- Fardawse Square Area Al Za'im Street Next to Al Saadoun Private Hospital

Tel no. 011 964 17 170953- Iraq- yanar2002@hotmail.com

0044 789 00 65933- nadia64uk@yahoo.com

www.equalityiniraq.com

In response to these allegations against the resistance by the 'Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq', Tahrir Swift, Arab Media Watch's director (www.arabmediawatch.com), based in the UK, wrote the following reaction, that was published on the website of IDAO (Iraqi Democrats Against Occupation - www.idao.org)

As US occupation forces intensify their attack on the people of Fallujah and other areas of Iraq, a pattern is now emerging in Britain to undermine the democratic opposition to the US-led occupation.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The main thrust of the campaign is to depict the resistance as being anti-women and terrorist in nature, using for this purpose unelected Iraqi trade union and women umbrella organisations. IDAO is pleased to publish a response by Ms. Tahrir Swift to such allegations by 'Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI).

(Letter of Tahrir Swift)

Forgive me for this unsolicited email. Someone forwarded your email about Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq to me. First of all, I think it is always sensible to know where a group of women attached to political party are coming from. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, are part of the Iraqi Worker's Communist Party, which is similar to the one in Iran. I find it ironic that their views are very similar to that of the Iraqi Communist Party (their arch rival) on this issue. I also detect a sense of looking down at one's own identity on the part of OWFI.

I have little doubt that many of the OWFI women are well meaning and do some good work in Iraq. However they are known to reduce women issues to domestic violence and the veil in their speeches that I have heard. I find their sense of timing absolutely appalling as the people of Fallujah are being bombed by the Americans day in day out. And are awaiting a Sharon type war crime in front of the whole silent shameful world.

I probably would not like it in Fallujah, I might not even like the Fallujans! But do they deserve to be slaughtered? Do their children deserve to be mutilated by the American bombs?

Yes, Fallujans are well known to be conservative and more so now when civil society is falling apart and the occupation is failing to live up to its duties under international law. Who am I to take up the moral high grounds and pass Judgment on them?

"Mujahideen Shura Group" in Fallujah, this is a group I have never heard of, could they not be 'one man and his dog' common criminals? OWFI does not tell us what makes them think that they belong to the resistance! I find it interesting that OWFI fails to mention that the committee of Islamic Scholars has issued a Fatwa in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal that women sexually abused in detention are victims who deserve our care and sympathy. This is unprecedented in Islamic countries.

"Killing/ Kidnapping/ selling into slavery in Mousel":

Is this new? Has it not been taking place since the invasion and the dissolving of the police force? Why is OWFI attributing this to 'Islamists'? What they cite is consistent with HRW report of June 2003. Indeed, I believe OWFI themselves criticized the occupation for failing to protect women in one of their statements and denounced such criminal acts.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



"Today, with the absence of any form of state in Iraq, the terrorist Islamists are seeking to implement their medieval laws through fear and horror" Whose fault is that?

"They kidnap women in the name of "resistance" and only release them after receiving thousands of dollars in ransom for each woman!" I have little doubt that there are mafia gangs operating in the name of the resistance, are they the real resistance? Whose fault is it that women and young girls are vulnerable to kidnapping? If the centre of London is to fall into lawlessness, would women be any safer? I was living in Brixton in the summer of 1984, the police lost control of the place for several hours due to the riots, there were rapes, car theft, looting and murder that night and I am pretty sure they were not carried out by Islamists!.

"Everyday they are killing Christians, university academics and lecturers, secular personalities, youth, children and any other creature moving on the ground"!

Wow! What proof has OWFI got that those who are killing academics are Islamists? The reports I have read in British newspapers and websites actually point to professional killing that never seems to miss or botch the assassinations (one bullet is enough). I think OWFI needs to know what is going on in the world before they start pointing fingers as they feel like it. Many of the scientists and academics killed were those pursued by the Americans who demanded that they leave Iraq before the war.

I have met a Syrian who is married to an Iraqi Christian at the ESF (15/17 Oct 2004) he had just left Iraq. He told me that all his in laws believe that the Mossad is behind all the attacks on their churches and all the killings. Remember the Americans attempted to blame Al Sadr supporters for such crimes. But while the borders are porous and the occupiers are failing even to protect their own back side it is not possible to ascertain with certainty who is behind them. Christians are not the only victims, the Shia were slaughtered at Najaf, at Kadumyia and Karabla. The Sunnis have been slaughtered with bombings and their mosques have been desecrated. It is obvious for the people that as the occupation is going from bad to worse, it would suit the Americans if Iraq is to unravel. The Syrian man, also said that there are Christians amongst the Iraqi fighters. I would also like to remind you that the first attack on a holy place in Iraq's modern history took place in 1950, when Mossad attacked the Baghdad Synagogue.

This is a highly irresponsible claim by the OWFI.

"In the city of Fallujah, at the Mujahideen congress held on October 20,2004, the Islamic criminal Abdulla al-Janabi and Falluja's Shura Council gave a fatwa (religious decree) that Mujahideen fighters should rape girls at age 10 before they are raped by Americans!" If OWFI has incontrovertible evidence that this man did issue this Fatwa, then he should be exposed and reported to the Committee of Islamic Scholars. Many mosque Imams have been arrested for criticizing the occupation recently, surely Allawi can arrest a man who issuing such an un- Islamic and criminal incitement.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Women in Iraq and the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq expose these forces, which try to delude people by posing as "resistance" to the US occupiers.

The Islamic movement has made it clear that even if the US forces are expelled or withdraw from Iraq , they will declare Jihad against any secular government!

Now this is really revealing, OWFI here is trying to find an excuse for not calling for the immediate withdrawal of the American troops (how very ICP!). Who is the 'Islamic movement' exactly? Allawi's allies in the interim government? Allawi and occupation opponents in Iraqi cities up and down the country?

I am puzzled by what seems to be a blatant attempt to smear the resistance by a group who claims to be opposed to the illegal occupation.

I find it very interesting that OWFI makes no mention of women suffering as a result of the occupation and continuous war on Iraqi cities. They make no mention of Iraqi women prisoners/ wives and families of those detained unlawfully. They make no mention of the plight of women 'servicing' the occupation forces.

More importantly, they make no mention of the current dire health situation as conceded by the health ministry. No mention either of the misuse of women issues by the US and their stooges in order to discredit the resistance and /or bomb them! When and where women cause was advanced by bombs?

This, by no means indicates that I am not worried by fired up individuals enforcing their own rules on women in universities. But, who is allowing them to do so? I sent a message of solidarity to Christian women students protesting about the enforcement of the scarf at the university of Mousel, in which I reminded them that young Muslim women in France are being forced to take off their head scarves before entering their schools in France. I reminded them of the brave pragmatic stand these young women took.

Tahrir Swift

I really hope you can publish this reaction. Because these thoughts reflect another Iraqi point of view. It's important for your audience to know.

Best regards.

Dirk Adriaensens

Executive committee of the **BRussells** Tribunal (www.brusselstribunal.org)

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Iraqi Women's Bodies Are Battlefields for War Vendettas

By Kavita N. Ramdas, Global Fund for Women

Posted on December 19, 2006

<http://www.alternet.org/story/45540/>

The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) recently issued a frightening report documenting the growing practice of public executions of women by Shia Militia. One of the report's more grisly accounts was a story of a young woman dragged by a wire wound around her neck to a close-by football field and then hung to the goal post. They pierced her body with bullets. Her brother came running trying to defend his sister. He was also shot and killed. Sunni extremists are no better: OWFI members estimate that no less than 30 women are executed monthly for honor related reasons.

Almost four years into the Bush Administration's ill fated adventure in Iraq, Iraqi women are worse off than they were under the Baathist regime in a country where, for decades, the freedoms and rights enjoyed by Iraqi women were the envy of women in most other countries of the Middle East.

Before the U.S. invasion, Iraqi women had high levels of education. Their strong and independent women's movement had successfully forced Saddam's government to pass the groundbreaking 1959 Family Law Act which ensured equal rights in matters of personal law. Iraqi women could inherit land and property; they had equal rights to divorce and custody of their children; they were protected from domestic violence within the marriage. In other words, they had achieved real gains in the struggle for equality between women and men. Iraqi women, like all Iraqis, certainly suffered from the political repression and lack of freedom, but the secular -- albeit brutal -- Baathist regime protected women from the religious extremism that denies freedom to a majority of women in the Arab world.

The invasion of Iraq, however, changed the status of Iraqi women for the worse. Iraq's new colonial power, the United States, elevated a new group of leaders, most of who were allied with ultra conservative Shia clerics. Among the Sunni minority, the quick disappearance of their once dominant political power led to a resurgence of religious identity. Consequently, the Kurds, celebrated for their history of resistance to the Iraqi dictator, were able to reclaim traditions like honor killings, putting thousands of women at risk.

Iraqi sectarian conflict has exacerbated violence against women, making women's bodies the battlefields on which vendettas and threats are played out. My organization, The Global Fund for Women, and the humanitarian community has long known that the presence of military troops in a region of conflict increases the rate of prostitution, violence against women, and the potential for human trafficking.

While many believed that interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq would result in greater freedoms for women, international women's rights organizations like the Global Fund for Women were highly

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



skeptical of the Bush administration's claims from the start. US representatives in Iraq failed to even listen to, much less validate, the voices of independent and secular Iraqi women leaders like Yana Mohammed during the process of drafting the constitution. As a result, the Iraqi constitution elevated Islamic law over constitutional rights for matters pertaining to personal and family matters.

For the first time in over 50 years of Iraq's history, Iraqi women's right to be treated as equal citizens has been overturned. This disgrace has happened on the watch of the United States. In many ways, it is no less shameful than the human rights abuses that occurred at Abu Ghraib. If left unchallenged, it has the potential to affect many thousands of innocent lives in the years to come.

Since the US has failed to protect Iraqi women's rights, a new Secretary General of the United Nations must demonstrate the courage and conviction to take action. The women of Iraq deserve nothing less. We owe them at least this much.

Kavita N. Ramdas, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Global Fund for Women, has won numerous awards for her vision and advancement of an inclusive philanthropy in which donors and grantees are treated as equal partners.

The height of humiliation

Threatened, abused, raped and tortured: such is the fate of untold numbers of Iraqi women amid the barbarous practices of the occupation. **Haifa Zangana*** examines the plight of Iraq's female security detainees – 22 June 2006

Within months of the occupation of Iraq, complaints surfaced of human rights violations in prisons administered by occupation authorities. It took almost a year and published photographs of horrific incidents of torture in Abu Ghraib before the world began to heed the voices of detainees and those trying to defend them.

Today, four years into the Anglo- American occupation, tens of thousands of Iraqis are still languishing in prison without charge, no trial in sight, deprived of the right to contest the grounds of their detention before judicial authorities. For various reasons, Iraqi women, too, have been caught up in the sweep of detentions and account for a goodly percentage of detainees, not only in Abu Ghraib, but in many other prisons. In addition to suffering the same hardships as male inmates, the women endure another plight: silence. The plight is two-fold, emanating, first, from the occupation authorities' denial that there are female detainees to begin with, and second from the nature of the stigma surrounding the arrest and detention of women.

I will discuss here obfuscations surrounding the existence of "female security detainees" and the pretexts cited by occupation authorities for detaining them. I will then address how women are

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



treated during the arrest and interrogation process, for their ordeal does not begin in prison but rather from the moment security forces descend upon them.

DENIAL: Occupation authorities (by which I mean foreign military forces and Iraqi army, police and special forces operating under the command of the occupation) apply the term "security detainee" to all "security detainees arrested under the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1546 on the grounds that they are considered an imperative threat to the stability and security of Iraq". So much for theory. In practice, a "security detainee" is anyone who has been subject to random arrest -- i.e. without a court order -- regardless of sex, age or circumstances.

Numerous rights organisations have reported the presence, "for security reasons," of female detainees in many prisons throughout Iraq. Evidence indicates widespread maltreatment, degradation and physical and psychological torture, in addition to unhealthy and unhygienic conditions of detention. There remains considerable uncertainty about the number of female detainees.

Among organisations involved in documenting the detention of Iraqi women are several independent women's and human rights groups operating inside Iraq and abroad (such as Women's Will, Occupation Watch, the Iraqi League and the Human Rights' Voice of Freedom), official and political party publications (notably those produced by the Association of Muslim Scholars, the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Iraqi National Media and Culture Organisation), and international agencies and human rights and anti-war organisations (Amnesty International, the International Red Cross, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq, and the BRussells Tribunal).

In addition, there is the personal testimony of detainees following their release. One such case is Hoda Al-Azawi, who was interviewed following her release from Abu Ghraib. Another is Abdul-Jabbar Al-Kubaysi, secretary-general of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance, who spent over a year in detention in Camp Cropper and who recalls hearing, night after night, day after day, the cries and screams of women being tortured under interrogation.

SECRECY AND SCANDAL: Estimates of the number of Iraqis arrested since the invasion in March 2003 range from 30,000 to 100,000. A heavy cloak of secrecy and misinformation surrounds the status and welfare of security detainees, even ones as well known as the short story writer and translator Mohsen Al-Khafafi who was arrested in April 2003 and only released in April this year. In general, occupation authorities refuse to be specific about the number of detainees -- perhaps to be at liberty to increase or reduce their number as deemed necessary.

The same applies to the extent and whereabouts of female detainees. However, in their case the source of secrecy is two-fold: over the first two years at least, not only did the occupation want to cover up its detention of women, so too did their families. There were two major reasons why these families would have wanted to collude in the silence. First, the detained women may have been

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



members of the Baath Party or one of its agencies and they feared revenge. Second, they feared the stigma of having a female relative in prison, the thought of which conjures up rape and unwanted pregnancy.

Occupation authorities, for their part, were eager to deny the existence of female detainees, especially after the sexual abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib. They refused to release information in the hope of deceiving public opinion at both the international and domestic levels. Internationally, the Bush administration was particularly wary of international peace, human rights and women's rights organisations and activists. After congressional members saw photographs of female prisoners at Abu Ghraib forced at gunpoint to bare their breasts, officials in the Bush administration blocked these photographs from going public. Although they cited reprisal attacks against US forces in Iraq, it is commonly believed that the cover up was to spare the US additional international ignominy.

Inside Iraq, occupation authorities suppressed information about female detainees so as not to provoke anger, on the one hand, and so as to give the Iraqi people the sense that the occupation respected local traditions, especially with regard to the sensitive status of women, on the other. On occasion, Iraqi collaborators helped promote this impression. On 18 April 2004, Ministry of Interior Chief Ahmed Youssef issued a statement denying maltreatment of female detainees. He said: "we are Muslims. We know very well how to treat our female detainees."

Apart from cases of such well-known detainees as Hoda Saleh Ammash and Rihab Taha, occupation authorities are generally mute about the existence of female detainees. Available information gives lie to their silence.

MALTREATMENT AND PROOF: On 20 April 2004, Abdul-Bassat Turki, the first Iraqi minister of human rights, gave an interview to *The Guardian* on the condition of female prisoners in Iraq. Turki had recently resigned from his post in protest against the human rights violations committed by American forces and Paul Bremer's determination to ignore his reports and to refuse him permission to visit Abu Ghraib.

Turki told the *Guardian* that he had warned Bremer repeatedly of the abuses of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, but that Bremer had consistently ignored all warnings. In December 2003, a month before the US military mounted its own secret investigation into Abu Ghraib, Turki phoned Bremer to complain of the treatment of female detainees. "They had been denied medical treatment. They had no proper toilet. They had only been given one blanket, even though it was winter," the former minister said.

Amnesty International interviewed several female victims of maltreatment and torture after their release from Abu Ghraib. Many complained of having been beaten, threatened with rape, verbally

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



abused and held in solitary confinement for long periods of time. One Amnesty report states that since the invasion in 2003 women in Iraqi jails have been routinely threatened with rape.

One of the rare occasions in which Anne Clwyd, the British human rights envoy to Iraq, was moved to speak out about human rights violations after the invasion was when she learned of the arrest and subsequent torture of a 70-year-old woman, whose torturers forced her into a makeshift bridle and then mounted her like a donkey.

A report by the Iraqi Women's Will organisation listed the types of physical and psychological torture inflicted upon women in Iraqi jails. Amongst the most degrading is being brought in nude for questioning and hence subject to derisive and humiliating remarks by interrogators, wardens and translators. Prior to this, detainees are routinely threatened to be deprived of water, food, have been confined to small cages inhibiting all movement, exposed to extremes of heat and cold, and subject to forced sleep deprivation.

Hoda Al-Ezawi relates that she was kept in solitary confinement for 156 days. Then her sister was arrested and thrown into the cell with her, along with the corpse of their dead brother. Among the other types of torture inflicted upon her was to be kept standing for more than 12 hours straight while subject to continual threat and intimidation. US forces and the Iraqi National Guard arrested Al-Ezawi along with her two daughters, Nora, 15, and Sara, 20, on 17 February 2005 on the charge of supporting the resistance.

Ali Al-Qeisi, the man whose torturers thrust a bag over his head, forced to stand on a crate as they coiled wires around him and then photographed producing the picture that has become a worldwide symbol of the occupation and the horror of Abu Ghraib, recalls his anguish at hearing the screams and cries of female detainees. "Their food was brought into their cells by naked men," he relates, adding, "we felt helpless as we listened to their screams, unable to do anything but pray to God Almighty."

The Ministry of Interior's Wolf Brigade arrested Khalda Zaki, a 46-year-old housewife, in her native Mosul. Soon afterwards she appeared on Iraqi state television claiming she had supported an insurgent group. Later she retracted this confession, revealing how her captors had whipped her and threatened to rape her. The "Wolves", a group founded in October 2004, received two months' intensive training by American military personnel before being deployed in security operations against "armed groups". The brigade has become notorious for its use of torture and other forms of inhuman treatment.

Suheib Baz, a cameraman for Al-Jazeera, told *The Independent* that he had personally seen a 12-year-old girl being tortured: "She was naked, and crying out to me for help while being beaten." He also relates that prison wardens would photograph these horrors.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Still, the denial continues or the figures are airbrushed. As a result, we continue to encounter such reports as, "On 6 February 2006, a military spokesman told the French Press Agency that 50 detainees had been released, although he denied that any women were among them," and "four women have remained in detention after 400 detainees were released last month, among whom were five women."

British authorities recently announced that since October 2005, British authorities no longer held any women or children in custody. Even taking this statement at face value, it indicates that British authorities had detained women and children prior to that date, in conflict with previous denials.

It also conflicts with statements made by General Muntazer Al-Samerani in interview with the French Press Agency in December 2005. The former supervisor of Iraqi Special Forces revealed the existence of nine secret detention centres as well as the existence of women detention centres in Baghdad in the districts of Kazemiya and Rishad. He added that the women in these centres were routinely subject to torture and rape.

On 20 October 2005, officials of the Kazemiya women's prison confirmed an instance of rape. The UN was refused permission to investigate.

According to a report of the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq, Iraqi police tortured a woman detained in Diwaniya police station since March 2005. The victim recounted that electric shocks were applied to her heels. She was told that her teenage daughter would be raped if she did not supply the information her interrogators wanted.

This is the tip of the iceberg. A report published by the Iraqi National Association for Human Rights on 29 October 2005 found that women held in Interior Ministry detention centres are subject to numerous human rights violations, including "systematic rape by the investigators and to other forms of bodily harm in order to coerce them into making confessions". The report added that prisons fail to meet even the most basic standards of hygiene and that the women were deprived of facilities as fundamental as toilets. The Ministry of Justice has confirmed the accuracy of the report.

In such circumstances, it is insult to injury that female detainees are often forced to sign a paper prior to their release in which they testify to being properly treated. The purpose of this affidavit is to silence them and deprive them of recourse to litigation in the future.

It should be noted, here, that the first question that is put to female detainees is: "Are you Sunni or Shia?" The second is, "Are you a virgin?"

METHODS OF ARREST: Random arrests continue in spite of the so-called "national unity government". Occupation forces are deliberately as brutal as possible when they raid people's homes.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



They threaten women, "confiscate" money, jewellery and other property, force women to watch as they deliberately humiliate their husbands, sons or fathers, and sometimes order them to take pictures with the cameras of American soldiers.

Most arrests and raids take place after midnight while people are asleep. In some neighbourhoods, women now sleep fully dressed so as not to be caught in their nightgowns if their homes are raided.

Heavy artillery -- including tanks and helicopters -- are sometimes deployed in raids, despite the fact that such a display of force far exceeds the demands of the operation. Slapping, kicking and insulting male members of the household and locking women and children into bathrooms are a matter of course.

In Mosul, on 18 June 2005, the Iraqi League met several former female detainees and relatives of women still in prison. The league learned the following: security forces routinely take wives, parents, brothers or sisters, or even minors, as hostages in the event the suspect they are pursuing is not home.

Interrogators almost invariably ask women who have been taken into detention about the whereabouts of their male relatives rather than restricting their questions to acts for which the women themselves may have been accountable.

There are numerous women in prison who were still nursing infants at the time of their arrest and suffer intense psychological trauma from being separated from their children.

UNLAWFUL PRETEXTS: One of the most widespread causes of the detention of women in Iraq is to be used as bargaining chips to force their male relatives to surrender to authorities. Wives and daughters are brought in and threatened with rape in front of their male relatives so as to coerce the latter into confessions.

Not uncommon, too, is for women to be arrested on the grounds of "supporting the resistance". The stories below only hint at the scale of the constant threat that hangs over the heads of Iraqi women:

"Zakiya Sabaawi has been arrested because her husband, who is wanted by the occupation army, has fled ... "

"Iman Ahmed, of Amiriya, was taken into custody in order to force her brother, who is being pursued by occupation forces, to surrender himself."

"Sara Taha Al-Jumaili of Falluja was arrested twice. The first time occurred on 19 October 2005, when US forces alleged that she was the daughter of Zarqawi. It is common knowledge that Sara is the daughter of Taha Al-Jumaili, the well-known politician, who was under detention with the

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



occupation forces when Sara was arrested. She was released in response to a popular demonstration and the declaration of a general strike. She was arrested again on 8 November on the charge of being a terrorist. Again, she was not released until the people declared a general strike and disseminated leaflets threatening the occupation forces with retaliatory acts."

"An official at the Iraqi Ministry of Justice announced yesterday that a board of review, consisting of six Iraqi officials and three American officers, met on 17 January and agreed to release the six Iraqi female detainees within a few days. Yesterday, the Ministry of Justice confirmed that it still expects US forces to release the women, in spite of US statements to the contrary... Since that time, the statements of Iraqi officials have conflicted with the statements of their American counterparts with regard to the release of six of the eight Iraqi women being held in American prisons on suspicion of involvement in terrorism."

"Occupation forces arrested Ilham Hussein, whose husband, Yasser Ibrahim Hassan, had just been killed in front of her and her family on 6 May 2006 during a raid on their home in the university district in central Baghdad. The couple had just celebrated the birth of their first son five days ago."

UNKNOWN JAILS: There are no exact figures on the number of jails and detention camps controlled by occupation authorities. According to a recent Amnesty International report, most "security detainees" are held in one of four American-run facilities: Camp Bukka outside Basra, Abu Ghraib in Baghdad, Camp Cropper in Baghdad and Fort Sousa near Suleimaniya. In addition to these, US forces use the detention facilities of various regiments throughout the country for temporary purposes. British forces hold a number of "security detainees" in a detention facility in the Shoeiba Camp near Basra.

Iman Khammas maintains that there are five secret prisons in Iraq on top of the 10 known, of which three are in Baghdad: the notorious Abu Ghraib, Al-Kazimiya and Al-Risafa. On 4 May 2004, Deputy Operations Commander Major General Jeffrey Miller told a press conference that in addition to the three major detention centres operated by the US army there were 13 or 14 smaller camps used for the assessment of detainees. Hajj Ali, director of the Organisation for the Defence of Detainees in Occupation Jails, remarked: "Under Saddam there were 13 prisons. Now there are 36 run by the government and 200 run by the militias. All these have the approval of the American government."

According to the report of the US State Department's Democracy and Human Rights Bureau of 6 March 2006, there are 450 detention centres in Iraq. Some of these are administered the Ministry of Interior and others by the Iraqi Ministry of Defence. In addition, there are secret detention centres scattered throughout the country. Kurdish parties also run at least five detention centres outside the official penal system.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



THIS IS INTOLERABLE: Torture and inhuman treatment are regarded as gross violations of human rights under the Fourth Geneva Convention (Article 147). Even following the supposed transfer of authority on 28 June 2004, the UN Security Council reaffirmed the continued and full standing of, and obligation of all parties to respect, international humanitarian law in Iraq, including the Geneva Conventions.

Torture and inhuman treatment are prohibited under international law, as reflected in the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court (Article 8:2) where cruel and inhuman treatment and torture in non-international armed disputes are considered war crimes.

Whereas Amnesty International ranked the security detention system -- and the acts of torture and brutality inflicted upon the detainees in that system -- as crimes of war, it described the system that supplanted it following the handover of sovereignty as tyrannical because of the systematic and widespread violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law.

The human rights organisation holds American-led multinational forces in Iraq directly responsible for these crimes, including those that are increasingly perpetrated by Iraqi security forces. International law and international humanitarian law make absolutely no exceptions on the prohibition of torture, even under conditions of emergency or warfare.

Compounding the intolerable, "multinational forces", and all who work with them, enjoy immunity from prosecution under Iraqi civil and criminal law, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1546 and the accompanying exchange of letters between Iraqi and American authorities. In addition, the recommendations of the joint board of review for the release of detainees, whose membership includes representatives from the Iraqi ministries of justice, interior and human rights, are not binding. It is the multinational forces' deputy commanding general for detention operations who has the ultimate say as to whether or not a detainee is to be released.

With respect to Iraqi governments under occupation, until now there are no cases of perpetrators of maltreatment, torture and murder having been brought to justice, with the sole exception of a few policemen in Baghdad charged with the systematic rape and torture of female detainees.

Female detainees, like men and children in Iraqi jails, are the victims of a brutal, degrading and life-threatening system. In addition, the gender-related injustices perpetrated in the course of arrest, interrogation and detention constitute a deliberate affront to the cherished values and morals of Iraqi society.

There will be no end to these violations as long as Iraq remains occupied by forces that enjoy immunity from prosecution under Iraqi law and as long as occupation authorities continue to treat Iraqi citizens with racist contempt in order to feel better about plundering the nation's wealth and

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



depriving its people of their most fundamental rights under international law and human rights conventions. It is all the more unfortunate that this situation is condoned by Iraqi authorities that claim to represent an independent and sovereign nation.

** The writer is a London-based Iraqi novelist. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/800/focus.htm>*

'50,000 Iraqi refugees' forced into prostitution

Women and girls, many alarmingly young, who fled the chaos at home are being further betrayed after reaching 'safety' in Syria

By Nihal Hassan in Damascus (24 June 2007)

It's Monday night in a dingy club on the outskirts of the Syrian capital. Two dozen girls are moving half-heartedly on the dance floor, lit up by flashing disco lights.

They are dressed in tight jeans, low-cut tops and knee-high boots, but the girls' make-up can't disguise the fact that most are in their mid-teens. It's a strange sight in a conservative Muslim country, but this is the sex business, and it's booming as a result of the war in Iraq.

Backstage, the manager sits in his leather chair, doing business. A Saudi client is quoted \$500 for one of the girls. Eventually he beats it down to \$300. Next door, in a dimly lit room, the next shift of girls arrives, taking off the black all-covering abaya they wear outside and putting on lipstick and mascara.

To judge from the cars parked outside, the clients come from all over the Gulf region - many are young Saudi men escaping from an even more conservative moral climate. But the Syrian friend who has brought me here tells me that 95 per cent of the girls are Iraqi.

Most are unwilling to talk, but Zahra, an attractive girl with a bare midriff and tattoos, tells me she's 16. She has been working in this club since fleeing to Syria from Baghdad after the war. She doesn't like it, she says, "but what can we do? I hope things get better in Iraq, because I miss it. I want to go back, but I have to look after my sister". Zahra points to a thin, pubescent girl with long black hair, who seems to be dancing quite happily. Aged 13, Nadia started in the club two months ago.

As the girls dance suggestively, allowing their breasts to brush against each other, one winks at a customer. But these girls are not just providing the floor show - they have paid to be here, and they need to pick up a client, or they'll lose money. If successful, they'll earn about \$60, equivalent to a month's wages in a factory.

There are more than a million Iraqi refugees in Syria, many are women whose husbands or fathers have been killed. Banned from working legally, they have few options outside the sex trade. No one

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

knows how many end up as prostitutes, but Hana Ibrahim, founder of the Iraqi women's group Women's Will, puts the figure at 50,000.

I met Fatima in a block of flats operating informally as a brothel in Saida Zainab, a run-down area with a large Iraqi population. Millions of Shias go there every year, because of the shrine of the prophet Mohamed's granddaughter. "I came to Syria after my husband was killed, leaving me with two children," Fatima tells me. "My aunt asked me to join her here, and my brothers pressured me to go." She didn't realise the work her aunt did, and she would be forced to take up, until she arrived.

Fatima is in her mid-20s, but campaigners say the number of Iraqi children working as prostitutes is high. Bassam al-Kadi of Syrian Women Observatory says: "Some have been sexually abused in Iraq, but others are being prostituted by fathers and uncles who bring them here under the pretext of protecting them. They are virgins, and they are brought here like an investment and exploited in a very ugly way."

Further viewing: Nihal Hassan and Nima Elbagir's report will appear on 'More4 News' at 8pm tomorrow

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article2701324.ece

<http://www.antiwar.com/jamail/?articleid=10113>

In Iraq, It's Hard Being a Woman

by Dahr Jamail *With Ali al-Fadhily* December 6, 2006

BAGHDAD - Once one of the best countries for women's rights in the Middle East, Iraq has now become a place where women fear for their lives in an increasingly fundamentalist environment.

Prior to the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, Iraqi women enjoyed rights under the Personal Status Law since July 14, 1958, the day Iraqis overthrew the British-installed monarchy.

Under this law they were able to settle civil suits in courts, unfettered by religious influences. Iraqi women had many of the rights enjoyed by women in Western countries.

The end of monarchy brought a regime in which women began to work as professors, doctors, and other professionals. They took government and ministerial positions and enjoyed growing rights even through the dictatorial reign of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath Party.

"Our rights had been hard to obtain in a country with a tradition of firm male control," Dr. Iman Robeii, professor of psychology from Fallujah told IPS in Baghdad. Iraqi women have traditionally

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



done all the housework and assisted children with school work, she said. On top of that, about 30 percent of women had been engaged in social activities.

"But a tragic collapse took place after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the so-called Islamists seized power to place new obstacles in the way of women's march towards improvement," she said.

A significant event was the Dec. 29, 2003, decision by the U.S.-installed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) to pass a bill that almost canceled the Personal Status Law, 45 years after it had been passed.

Under Resolution 137, Iraqi women would rely on religious institutions for personal matters such as marriage and divorce, as opposed to recourse to civilian courts that they could access before the invasion.

Women across Iraq saw the IGC move as one of the first hazardous steps toward implementation of a fundamentalist Islamic law. The bill did not pass, but the slide into Sharia (Islamic law) had already taken root through much of Shia-dominated southern Iraq and some Sunni-dominated areas of central Iraq.

Resolution 137 was defeated in March 2004. A new Iraqi constitution has been introduced, but the adoption of the constitution has not helped protect women's rights.

Yanar Mohammed, one of Iraq's staunchest women's rights advocates, believes the constitution neither protects women nor ensures their basic rights. She blames the United States for abdicating its responsibility to help develop a pluralistic democracy in Iraq.

"The U.S. occupation has decided to let go of women's rights," Mohammed told reporters. "Political Islamic groups have taken southern Iraq, are fully in power there, and are using the financial support of Iran to recruit troops and allies. The financial and political support from Iran is why the Iraqis in the south accept this, not because the Iraqi people want Islamic law."

Mohammed believes the drafting of the Iraqi constitution was "not for the interest of the Iraqi people" and instead was based on concessions to ethnic and sectarian groups.

"The Kurds want Kirkuk [an oil-rich city they consider the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan], and the Shias want the Islamic Republic of Iraq, just like Iran's," she said. "The genie is out of the bottle in terms of political Islam [by Shias] and the resistance [by Sunnis]. America will tolerate any conclusion so they can leave, even if it means destroying women's rights and civil liberties. They have left us a regime like the Taliban."

A woman judge told IPS that she and her female colleagues could not go to work any more because the current system does not allow for a female judge.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Iraqi NGO activists have also criticized the new constitution for depriving women of leadership posts in the country. "The constitution mentions some rights for women, but those in power laugh when they are asked to put it to practice," she said. Like the female judge, she too did not want to be named.

The key element in the Iraqi constitution that is dangerous for women's rights is Article 2, which states "Islam is the official religion of the state and is a basic source of legislation." Subheading A under Article 2 states that "No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam."

Under Article 2, the interpretation of women's rights is left to religious leaders, and it provides for implementation of Sharia law, which can turn the clock back on women's rights in Iraq.

The social environment in Iraq has become acutely difficult for women already. Many women now fear leaving their homes.

"I try to avoid leaving my home, and when I do, I always cover my face," Suthir Ayad told IPS at her house in Baghdad. "Several of my friends have been threatened or beaten by these Shia militias who insist we stay home and never show our faces."

In southern Iraq, the situation seems even worse.

"My cousin in Basra was beaten savagely by some of the Mahdi Army [the militia of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr] because she tried to attend university," said a woman who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Now she never leaves her home unless fully covered, and then only to shop for food."

(Inter Press Service)

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

Russells Tribunal Dossier



IRAQ: Women forced to give up their jobs, marriages



Photo: Afif

Sarhan/IRIN 

Many Iraqi women say they are discriminated against

BAGHDAD, 30 May 2007 (IRIN) - When Suha Abdel-Azim, 38, received a letter from her boss saying she had to stop working for security reasons, she couldn't believe it. After three years as an engineer for a local company, she was fired without compensation.

"I was shocked when they told me I was being fired. I was an excellent worker and had done many fantastic and profitable projects but they didn't want a woman with them any more. They tried to explain, saying it was too dangerous for the company to employ women: the company had received threats," Suha said.

"I tried to convince them that I could work from home. I have two children to bring up, and have been alone since my husband was killed by insurgents in 2004 for working for a foreign company, but in vain. They just sent me home," she said.

Suha is now unemployed. She has been trying to find a job but as a woman she is finding it difficult.

"When they see my cv [curriculum vitae] they get excited but later they say they cannot employ me because I'm a woman and it could be too dangerous for them. Most of the local construction companies in Iraq now have only men working for them," she said.

Unemployment affects children

"In about 14 percent of families in Iraq women are the main breadwinners, and often they care for a large number of children. The increase in unemployment among them just means more children without support," said Sarah Muthulak, a spokeswoman for the Baghdad-based Women's Rights Association (WRA).

"Discrimination against women today is unprecedented. They are being sacked because of their gender; that is unacceptable," she added.

Women say they are being threatened for working outside their homes and in places which are mostly patronised by men.

"Insurgents and militias want us out of the work environment for many reasons: Some because they believe that women were born to stay at home - cooking and cleaning - and others because they say it is against Islam to share the same space with men who are not close relatives," Nuha Salim, spokeswoman for the Baghdad-based NGO, Women's Freedom, said.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Forced to divorce

For other women in Iraq the problem goes beyond unemployment. With spiralling sectarian violence, they are being forced to marry men from their own sect even if they were in love for years with a man from a different sect.

“ Insurgents and militias want us out of the work environment...”

“I was in love with a colleague in my college for more than three years. My family were going to accept our marriage but last year when my cousin was killed by [Shia] militants, my parents prohibited me from marrying him,” said Nur Abdel-Amir, 23, a Baghdad resident.

“For two months now I have been in a forced marriage. He is from my own sect but I don’t like him and nor does he love me but we don’t have a choice. If I refuse I would die and so I will have to live the rest of my life with a man whom I cannot imagine sleeping with,” Nur added.

Nuha from Women’s Freedom said the problem is serious and getting worse. What is happening now in Iraq is a far cry from in the days of Saddam Hussein’s regime when it was safe to marry across the sectarian divide.

“There are cases of women who are being forced to sign divorce papers after being threatened by their husband’s family because they were of a different sect - even if they had been living for years in harmony or if innocent children were involved,” she added.

Women teachers face threats

Women have also been prohibited by Shia militias from teaching other women. The threat has become real after two teachers - one in the mostly Shia Sadr City district and one in Kadhmiyah neighbourhood - were killed after giving lessons to illiterate women near their homes.

“They were brave women who stood up against the violence, and tried to promote education among those who had never had the opportunity,” Nuha said. “They were killed just because they wanted to help other women to read and write.”

More on women in Iraq

📄 **“Mine is a dirty and miserable life”**

📄 **Kurdish women struggle to advance**

📄 **Killings drive women to become suicide bombers**

📄 **“I discovered I was made pregnant by a rapist”**

📄 **Insecurity and poverty put pregnant women in danger**

In many villages, girls have been taken out of school and forced to stay at home without education.

“Girls and women don’t need to read. They should be good mothers and housewives. The schools are

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



just imbuing them with new and modern ideas that are inconsistent with Muslim women's duties," said Khalid Hassan, a Mahdi Army officer in Muthana Governorate.

"We have threatened all teachers near our villages, telling them to stop teaching, especially teaching women and girls," Hassan said.

WRA's Muthulak said many women activists' organisations in Iraq are developing projects to offer free education to women, but most of them have been threatened recently and will probably be forced to stop working for security reasons.

as/ar/cb

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72451>

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IRAQ: Women Resist Return to Sectarian Laws

by Ellen Massey

WASHINGTON - As Iraq struggles to define its future, there is one important group that has been largely left out of the process: women.

But they are refusing to be left behind. With little international support or media attention, a network of more than 150 women's organisations across Iraq is fighting to preserve their rights in the new constitutional revision process.

As part of a campaign to garner international support, the Iraq Women's Movement sent a letter in May to U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and another to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressing concern over the constitutional review process taking place and calling for international support for their effort to preserve women's rights in Iraqi law.



With little international support or media attention, a network of more than 150 women's organisations across Iraq is fighting to preserve their rights in the new constitutional revision process. REUTERS/Ali Jasim (IRAQ)

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



“As women face escalating violence and exclusion in Iraq, they have been marginalised in reconciliation initiatives and negotiations for government positions,” the letter noted.

“Even with the shy and insignificant pressure exerted by the U.N. and other international donors/players on the Iraqi government and politicians to fulfill minimum obligations of Security Council Resolution 1325, the action taken has been a sequence of disappointments...”

Passed in 2000, Resolution 1325 emphasises the importance of women’s participation in conflict resolution and peace-building processes. A second resolution, 1483, applies this conviction specifically to Iraq.

More than three years ago, the United States was instrumental in overturning an amendment to the interim constitution that would have lifted protections for women and children. U.S. and international pressure, and Iraqi women who took to the streets, succeeded in defeating the provision, which was contradictory to many other parts of the constitution.

Following that triumph, women turned out in record numbers for the 2005 election. They secured 33 percent of the seats in the National Assembly but remain woefully absent from other influential branches of the government, according to a 2006 report from the Iraq Legal Development Project.

The effectiveness of previous international pressure has spurred the women’s movement in Iraq to call the world’s attention to this issue once again, but there has been little acknowledgement of their effort so far. The office of the U.N. secretary-general has released only a very general statement about the review process since the Iraqi Women’s Movement sent their letter on May 21. Pelosi’s office has not yet recognised the letter publicly.

Hanaa Edwar is a leader of the Iraqi Women’s Movement and founder of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, a national civil society group based in Baghdad. She is campaigning against Article 41, a provision buried in the text of the draft constitution that places personal status laws under the influence of religion, sect or belief. These are the laws that administer marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and how religious courts settle disputes among Muslims, Christians and Jews.

But “there is no unity across sects or even within sects” on the rules that govern family and women’s status, Edwar noted.

Warning that the current language could “deepen the sectarian issues in this society”, Edwar added: “We feel that this is not a women’s demand, it is a national demand. This is important for national security.”

“National security” is a term that the U.S. Congress knows well, and the Iraqi women appealed to the issues that are keystones of U.S. policy in the Middle East. Their letter to Pelosi asks for “help in

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



preventing Iraq from taking the identity of a Religious State,” and includes a reminder that, “any destabilisation in the state of law, economy and security in Iraq can reflect on the security and stability of the whole region.”

Mary Trotochaud, an activist who has worked both on the ground in Iraq and with lawmakers in Washington, told IPS that, “This movement originates from three generations of women who had really strong rights.”

Iraq’s progressive women’s rights laws began when the “personal status laws” were included in the 1959 Constitution. In 1970, women were formally guaranteed equal rights and additional laws ensured their right to vote, attend school, run for office and own property.

Iraq has also ratified a series of international treaties that guarantee equal rights for all, including the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that protect the pluralistic nature of Iraqi society and offer unprecedented protections to women in an Arab country.

Yet Iraqi women still faced considerable historical obstacles to their political participation, including Ba’ath policies that disenfranchised them and Saddam Hussein’s strengthening of Islamic and tribal traditions in an effort to consolidate power in the 1990s.

“These are human rights issues that we’re talking about that we should be advocating all the time in all countries,” Trotochaud said. “We shouldn’t be shy about saying that.”

The most recent campaign to preserve these rights began in 2003 in the wake of Hussein’s fall and the dissolution of Iraq’s existing legal, political and economic systems. Women’s groups began springing up around the country and organising to advocate for their rights and participation in the new constitution and government.

The network of groups held regional and national meetings and met with parliamentarians and officials across sect and party lines. “When the time for constitutional conventions came, women were already organised,” said Trotochaud, who was living in Iraq at the time.

However, the spiraling violence has taken its toll on the campaign. “The sectarian divide has gotten big enough that people who have worked together in the past don’t work together now,” she added.

The constitutional review process has laboured on for the past six months with few signs of progress. Debate remains bogged down in issues like the disposition of Kirkuk, an oil-rich city in the northern, Kurdish-dominated region; the distribution of national wealth; and de-Baathification.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

Article 41, which places family law under religious and tribal traditions, is still in the drafts of the constitution and women's rights in the process remain a backstage issue.

Edwar said that the Constitutional Review Committee has been granted another month to complete its work. Refusing to be discouraged by the lack of international attention, she looks at the delay as an opportunity to advance the movement's goals of ensuring that women's rights and family law will be included in her country's new constitution and that civil society will be a part of the process.

The Iraqi Women's Movement has submitted its own language to the review committee for consideration to replace the objectionable Article 41. It says that, "The Iraqi state should ensure that personal status laws should be organised according to law." Edwar said they were often met with support for the Movement's appeal but that "women's issues are one of the compromise issues among politicians."

There is likely little that will stop the political maneuvering in the run-up to the referendum on the new constitution. But Edwar made clear that the Iraqi Women's Movement will continue its campaign to preserve human rights until the very last moment and she represents a political force that will keep women's rights on the political agenda for years to come.

As stated in their letter to Pelosi, "Our hopes in our nation are big, but our trust in our women's resilience has no boundaries."

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The Hidden War on Women in Iraq

by Ruth Rosen

Abu Ghraib. Haditha. Guantanamo. These are words that shame our country. Now, add to them Mahmudiya, a town 20 miles south of Baghdad. There, this March, a group of five American soldiers allegedly were involved in the rape and murder of Abeer Qassim Hamza, a young Iraqi girl. Her body was then set on fire to cover up their crimes, her father, mother, and sister murdered. The rape of this one girl, if proven true, is probably not simply an isolated incident. But how would we know? In Iraq, rape is a taboo subject. Shamed by the rape, relatives of this girl wouldn't even hold a public funeral and were reluctant to reveal where she is buried.

Like women everywhere, Iraqi women have always been vulnerable to rape. But since the American invasion of their country, the reported incidence of sexual terrorism has accelerated markedly. -- and

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



this despite the fact that few Iraqi women are willing to report rapes either to Iraqi officials or to occupation forces, fearing to bring dishonor upon their families. In rural areas, female rape victims may also be vulnerable to "honor killings" in which male relatives murder them in order to restore the family's honor. "For women in Iraq," Amnesty International concluded in a 2005 report, "the stigma frequently attached to the victims instead of the perpetrators of sexual crimes makes reporting such abuses especially daunting."

This specific rape of one Iraqi girl, however, is now becoming symbolic of the way the Bush administration has violated Iraq's honor; Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has already launched an inquest into the crime. In an administration that normally doesn't know the meaning of an apology, the American ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad and the top American commander in Iraq, Gen. George W. Casey Jr. both publicly apologized. In a fierce condemnation, the Muslim Scholars Association in Iraq denounced the crime: "This act, committed by the occupying soldiers, from raping the girl to mutilating her body and killing her family, should make all humanity feel ashamed."

Shame, yes, but that is hardly sufficient. After all, rape is now considered a war crime by the International Criminal Court.

It wasn't always that way. Soldiers have long viewed women as the spoils of war, even when civilian or military leaders condemned such behavior, but in the early 1990s, a new international consensus began to emerge on the act of rape. Prodded by an energized global women's movement, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993. Subsequent statutes in the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, as well as the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court in July 2002, all defined rape as a crime against humanity or a war crime.

No one accuses American soldiers of running through the streets of Iraq, raping women as an instrument of war against the insurgents (though such acts are what caused three Bosnian soldiers, for the first time in history, to be indicted in 2001 for the war crime of rape).

Still, the invasion and occupation of Iraq has had the effect of humiliating, endangering, and repressing Iraqi women in ways that have not been widely publicized in the mainstream media: As detainees in prisons run by Americans, they have been sexually abused and raped; as civilians, they have been kidnapped, raped, and then sometimes sold for prostitution; and as women -- and, in particular, as among the more liberated women in the Arab world -- they have increasingly disappeared from public life, many becoming shut-ins in their own homes.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Rape and sexual humiliation in prisons

The scandal of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib focused on the torture, sexual abuse, and humiliation of Iraqi men. A variety of sources suggest that female prisoners suffered similar treatment, including rape.

Few Americans probably realize that the American-run prison at Abu Ghraib also held female detainees. Some of them were arrested by Americans 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.

According to a Human Rights Watch report, the secrecy surrounding female detentions "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.

On the condition of anonymity and in great fear, some female detainees nevertheless did speak with human rights workers after being released from detention. They have described beatings, torture, and isolation. Like their male counterparts, they reserve their greatest bitterness for sexual humiliations suffered in American custody. Nearly all female detainees reported being threatened with rape. Some women were interrogated naked and subjected to derision and humiliating remarks by soldiers.

The British Guardian reported that one female prisoner managed to smuggle a note out of Abu Ghraib. She claimed that American guards were raping the few female detainees held in the prison and that some of them were now pregnant. In desperation, she urged the Iraqi resistance to bomb the jail in order to spare the women further shame.

Amal Kadham Swadi, one of seven Iraqi female attorneys attempting to represent imprisoned women, told the *Guardian* that only one woman she met with was willing to speak about rape. "She was crying. She told us she had been raped. Several American soldiers had raped her. She had tried to fight them off, and they had hurt her arm. She showed us the stitches. She told us, 'We have daughters and husbands. For God's sake don't tell anyone about this.'"

Professor Huda Shaker, a political scientist at Baghdad University, also 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.

Professor Shaker added, "A female colleague of mine was arrested and taken there. When I asked her after she was released what happened at Abu Ghraib, she started crying. Ladies here are afraid and shy

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



of talking about such subjects. They say everything is OK. Even in a very advanced society in the west it is very difficult to talk about rape."

Shaker, herself, encountered a milder form of sexual abuse at the hands of one American soldier. At a checkpoint, she said, an American soldier "pointed the laser sight [of his gun] directly in the middle of my chest... Then he pointed to his penis. He told me, 'Come here, bitch, I'm going to fuck you.'"

Writing from Baghdad, Luke Hardin of the *Guardian* reported that at Abu Ghraib journalists have been forbidden from talking to female detainees, who are cloistered in tiny windowless cells. Senior US military officers who have escorted journalists around Abu Ghraib, however, have admitted that rapes of women took place in the cellblock where 19 "high-value" male detainees were also being held. Asked how such abuse could have happened, Colonel Dave Quantock, now in charge of the prison's detention facilities, responded, "I don't know. It's all about leadership. Apparently it wasn't there."

No one should be surprised that women detainees, like male ones, were subjected to sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib. Think of the photographs we've already seen from that prison. If acts of ritual humiliation could be used to "soften up" men, then the rape of female detainees is hardly unimaginable.

But how can we be sure? In January, 2004, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the senior U.S. military official in Iraq, ordered Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba to investigate persistent allegations of human rights abuses at Abu Ghraib. The Taguba Report confirmed that in at least one instance a U.S. military policeman had raped at least one female prisoner and that guards had videotaped and photographed naked female detainees. Seymour Hersh also reported in a 2004 issue of the *New Yorker* magazine that these secret photos and videos, most of which still 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. In one photograph, a woman is raising her shirt, baring her breasts, presumably as she was ordered to do.

The full range of pictures and videotapes are likely to show a great deal more. Members of Congress who viewed all the pictures and videotapes from Abu Ghraib seemed genuinely shaken and sickened by what they saw. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn called them "appalling;" then-Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle described them as "horrific." Ever since the scandal broke in April 2004, human rights and civil liberties groups have been engaged in a legal battle with the Department of Defense, demanding that it release the rest of the visual documents. Only when all those documents are available to the general public will we have a clearer - and undoubtedly more ghastly - record of the sexual acts forced upon both female and male detainees.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Sexual Terrorism on the Streets

Meanwhile, the chaos of the war has also led to a rash of kidnappings and rapes of women outside of prison walls. After interviewing rape and abduction victims, as well as eyewitnesses, Iraqi police and health professionals, and U.S. military police and civil affairs officers, Human Rights Watch released a report in July, 2003, titled *Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Baghdad*. Only months after Baghdad fell to U.S. forces, they had already learned of twenty-five credible allegations of the rape and/or abduction of Iraqi women. Not surprisingly, the report found that "police officers gave low priority to allegations of sexual violence and abduction, that the police were under-resourced, and that victims of sexual violence confronted indifference and sexism from Iraqi law enforcement personnel." Since then, as chaos, violence, and bloodletting have descended on Iraq, matters have only gotten worse.

After the American invasion, local gangs began roaming Baghdad, snatching girls and women from the street. Interviews with human rights investigators have produced some horrifying stories. Typical was nine-year-old "Saba A." who was abducted from the stairs of the building where she lives, taken to an abandoned building nearby, and raped. A family friend who saw Saba A. immediately following the rape told Human Rights Watch:

"She was sitting on the stairs, here, at 4:00 p.m. It seems to me that probably he hit her on the back of the head with a gun and then took her to [a neighboring] building. She came back fifteen minutes later, bleeding [from the vaginal area]. [She was still bleeding two days later, so] we took her to the hospital." The medical report by the U.S. military doctor who treated Saba A. "documented bruising in the vaginal area, a posterior vaginal tear, and a broken hymen."

In 2005, Amnesty International also interviewed abducted women. The story of "Asma," a young engineer, was representative. She was shopping with her mother, sister, and a male relative when six armed men forced her into a car and drove her to a farmhouse outside the city. They repeatedly raped her. A day later, the men drove her to her neighborhood and pushed her out of the car.

As recently as June 2006, Mayada Zhaair, spokeswoman for the Women's Rights Association, a local NGO, 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."

No one knows how many abducted women have never returned. As one Iraqi police inspector testified, "Some gangs specialize in kidnapping girls, they sell them to Gulf countries. This happened before the war too, but now it is worse, they can get in and out without passports." Others interviewed by Human Rights Watch argued that such trafficking in women had not occurred before the invasion.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



The U.S. State Department's June 2005 report on the trafficking of women suggested that the extent of the problem in Iraq is "difficult to appropriately gauge" under current chaotic circumstances, but cited an unknown number of Iraqi women and girls being sent to Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and Persian Gulf countries for sexual exploitation.

In May 2006, Brian Bennett wrote in *Time Magazine* that a visit to "the Khadamiyah Women's Prison in the northern part of Baghdad immediately produces several tales of abduction and abandonment. A stunning 18-year-old nicknamed Amna, her black hair pulled back in a ponytail, says she was taken from an orphanage by an armed gang just after the US invasion and sent to brothels in Samarra, al-Qaim on the border with Syria, and Mosul in the north before she was taken back to Baghdad, drugged with pills, dressed in a suicide belt and sent to bomb a cleric's office in Khadamiyah, where she turned herself in to the police. A judge gave her a seven-year jail sentence 'for her sake' to protect her from the gang, according to the prison director."

"Families and courts," Bennett reported, "are usually so shamed by the disappearance [and presumed rape] of a daughter that they do not report these kidnappings. And the resulting stigma of compromised chastity is such that even if the girl should resurface, she may never be taken back by her relations."

Disappearing women

To avoid such dangers, countless Iraqi women have become shut-ins in their own homes. Historian Marjorie Lasky has described this situation in "Iraqi Women Under Siege," a 2006 report for Codepink, an anti-war women's organization. Before the war, she points out, many educated Iraqi women participated fully in the work force and in public life. Now, many of them rarely go out. They fear kidnap and rape; they are terrified of getting caught in the cross-fire between Americans and insurgents; they are frightened by sectarian reprisals; and they are scared of Islamic militants who intimidate or beat them if they are not "properly covered."

"In the British-occupied south," Terri Judd reported in the British *Independent*, "where Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi's Army retains a stranglehold, women insist the situation is at its worst. Here they are forced to live behind closed doors only to emerge, concealed behind scarves, hidden behind husbands and fathers. Even wearing a pair of trousers is considered an act of defiance, punishable by death."

Invisible women -- for some Iraqi fundamentalist Islamic leaders, this is a dream come true. The Ministry of the Interior, for example, recently issued notices warning women not to go out on their own. "This is a Muslim country and any attack on a woman's modesty is also an attack on our religious beliefs," said Salah Ali, a senior ministry official. Religious leaders in both Sunni and Shiite mosques have used their sermons to persuade their largely male congregations to keep working women at home. "These incidents of abuse just prove what we have been saying for so long," said Sheikh Salah

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Muzidin, an imam at a mosque in Baghdad. "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."

In the early 1970s, American feminists redefined rape and argued that it was an act driven not by sexual lust, but by a desire to exercise power over another person. Rape, they argued, was an act of terrorism that kept all women from claiming their right to public space. That is precisely what has happened to Iraqi women since the American invasion of Iraq. Sexual terrorism coupled with religious zealotry has stolen their right to claim their place in public life.

This, then, is a hidden part of the unnecessary suffering loosed by the reckless invasion of Iraq. Amid the daily explosions and gunfire that make the papers is a wave of sexual terrorism, whose exact dimensions we have no way of knowing, and that no one here notices, unleashed by the Bush administration in the name of exporting "democracy" and fighting "the war on terror."

Historian and journalist Ruth Rosen teaches history and public policy at U.C. Berkeley and is a senior fellow at the Longview Institute. A new edition of her most recent book, "The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America" (Penguin, 2001), will be published with an updated epilogue in 2007.

Iraqi Women May Lose Basic Rights Under New Constitution

Published on Saturday, July 23, 2005 by the Inter Press Service

by Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The irony is not lost either amongst women's groups in Baghdad or activists in the United States: Iraqi women who enjoyed basic human rights under one of the world's most repressive regimes headed by former President Saddam Hussein are now on the verge of losing their hard-won freedoms under a U.S.-blessed administration in the insurgent-ravaged country.

"We express our deepest concern and worry about the drafts lately released by the (Iraqi) Constitutional Committee, specifically relating to the chapter on duties and rights, in which the (Islamic) sharia law was clearly stated as the main source of legislation in the new Iraqi constitution," the Iraqi Women's Movement said in an appeal to the United Nations.

According to this draft, the new Iraqi transitional government acknowledges the equal rights of men and women in all fields -- "as long as it doesn't contradict with sharia law."

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



If implemented, the proposed new laws will restrict women's rights, specifically in matters relating to marriage, divorce and family inheritance. A marriage enjoined by a woman's free will is likely to be made more difficult, and divorces by men relatively easier.

Several key rights that were included in the interim Iraqi constitution are also at risk of being taken out of the new constitution by the drafting committee.

Appealing to the United Nations, parliamentarians and to international women's organizations, the Iraqi Women's Movement says: "We want the constitution to recognize women's human rights as mother, worker and citizen, and also prevent all kinds of violence and discrimination against women."

The Movement is also asking for a quota of not less than 40 percent for women in all decision-making positions. Additionally, it wants the government to recognize international conventions the country has signed and ratified.

Jessica Neuwirth, president of the U.S.-based women's advocacy group Equality Now, told IPS: "We believe that the constitution of Iraq should be compatible with fundamental human rights and with Iraq's obligations under international law."

She pointed out that Iraq is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which sets forth the obligation to embody the principle of equality of men and women in their national constitutions.

"Women in Iraq, who have been disproportionately excluded from representation on the panel drafting the constitution, support and are publicly protesting for this right to equality," she said.

"We would hope that the international community as a whole would support the call of these women for inclusion of this basic human right in the Iraqi constitution and respect for all international human rights standards," Neuwirth added.

"The women of Iraq are counting on the international community for help," says Basma AlKhateeb, the Amman-based Iraq program coordinator for the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

"Yes, the threat is big, and many political compromises are expected to take place between the different influential political groups in the Iraqi National Assembly," AlKhateeb told IPS.

She said the political maneuvering will continue until the last minute, before a final draft is approved by Aug. 15, which in turn will have to be ratified in a constitutional referendum by Oct. 15.

AlKhateeb also said that Iraqi women feel that since there is very little time left, there should be urgent international pressure on Iraqis responsible for drafting the constitution.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



She said that Iraqi women have started to mobilize against the current documents and are lobbying Iraqi political leaders and government officials. But they are also appealing to donors and the international community to make sure that the new constitution will ensure the basic human rights of women.

Hanaa Edwar of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, which organized a demonstration and a "sit-in" in Baghdad last week, says that despite the deteriorating security situation, "brave women from different governorates have taken the initiative to raise their voices demanding equal rights for women."

She said her organization was not only protesting against the attempt to marginalize the role of women but also to complain about depriving civil society organizations a role in drafting the constitution.

Edwar said their three-hour protest last week "has inspired us to widen our campaign in involve both men and women, in supporting our just demands."

Expressing her sympathies with Iraqi women fighting for their rights, Charlotte Bunch of the U.S.-based Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) described the issue as "complicated."

Firstly, she said, "I do think that the United States should not be in Iraq and should leave as quickly as possible." But since it still has a military presence in that country, "it has a lot of responsibility for the situation there."

"Therefore, I think that the United States should be held accountable for its disregard of the impact on women's rights of the (military) occupation -- something many people said in advance when the Bush administration tried to claim the war would benefit women, and many pointed out that Iraq had some of the best laws and policies regarding women's rights already," Bunch told IPS.

"So yes, I think that the U.S. government should respond to the call from women's groups in Iraq and work to ensure that equality is guaranteed in the constitution and that more women are involved in this process," she added.

"After all, the United States had much to do with picking people to be involved in reconstruction and has done little to bring women's rights advocates into the process. It can and should still do so now," Bunch said.

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Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



For the Women of Iraq, the War is Just Beginning

by Terri Judd

Published on Thursday, June 8, 2006 by the Independent / UK

The women of Basra have disappeared. Three years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, women's secular freedoms - once the envy of women across the Middle East - have been snatched away because militant Islam is rising across the country.

Across Iraq, a bloody and relentless oppression of women has taken hold. Many women had their heads shaved for refusing to wear a scarf or have been stoned in the street for wearing make-up. Others have been kidnapped and murdered for crimes that are being labelled simply as "inappropriate behaviour". The insurrection against the fragile and barely functioning state has left the country prey to extremists whose notion of freedom does not extend to women.

In the British-occupied south, where Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army retains a stranglehold, women insist the situation is at its worst. Here they are forced to live behind closed doors only to emerge, concealed behind scarves, hidden behind husbands and fathers. Even wearing a pair of trousers is considered an act of defiance, punishable by death.

One Basra woman, known only as Dr Kefaya, was working in the women and children's hospital unit at the city university when she started receiving threats from extremists. She defied them. Then, one day a man walked into the building and murdered her.

Eman Aziz, one of the first women to speak publicly about the dangers, said: "There were five people on the death list with Dr Kefaya. They were threatened 'If you continue working, you will be killed'."

Many women are too afraid to complain. But, fearful that their rights will be eroded for good, some have taken the courageous step of speaking out.

Dr Kefaya was only one of many professional women murdered in recent months. Speaking to The Independent near Saddam's old palace in the middle of Basra, Mrs Aziz, reeled off the names of other dead friends. Three of her university class have been killed since the invasion. "My friend Sheda and her sister. They were threatened. One day they returned to their house with two other women. They were all shot," she said. Her language is chillingly perfunctory.

"And my friend Lubna, she was with her fiancé. They shot him in the arm and then killed her in front of him," she explained. Then there were the two sisters who worked in the laundry at Basra Palace base. With a shrug, she briefly detailed each life cut short.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



Under Saddam, women played little part in political life but businesswomen and academics travelled the country unchallenged while their daughters mixed freely with male students at university.

Now, even the most emancipated woman feels cowed.

A television producer Arij Al-Soltan, 27, now exiled, said: "It is much worse for women in the south. I blame the British for not taking a strong stand."

Sajeda Hanoon Alebadi, 37, who - like Mrs Aziz - has now taken to wearing a headscarf, said: "Women are being assassinated. We know the people behind it are saying we have a fatwa, these are not good women, they should be killed."

Behind the wave of insurgent attacks, the violence against women who dare to challenge the Islamic orthodoxy is growing. Fatwas banning women from driving or being seen out alone are regularly issued.

Infiltrated by militia, the police are unwilling or unable to crack down on the fundamentalists.

Ms Alebadi said: "After the fall of the regime, the religious extremist parties came out on to the streets and threatened women. Although the extremists are in the minority, they control powerful positions, so they control Basra."

To venture on the streets today without a male relative is to risk attack, humiliation or kidnap.

A journalist, Shatta Kareem, said: "I was driving my car one day when someone just crashed into me and drove me off the road. If a woman is seen driving these days it is considered a violation of men's rights."

There is a fear that Islamic law will become enshrined in the new legislation. Ms Aziz said: "In the Muslim religion, if a man dies his money goes to a male member of the family. After the Iran-Iraq war, there were so many widows that Saddam changed the law so it would go to the women and children. Now it has been changed back."

Mrs Alebadi estimated that as many as 70 per cent of women in Basra had been widowed by the constant conflicts. "You see widows on the streets begging at the intersections."

Optimists say the very fact that 25 per cent of Iraq's Provincial Council is composed of women proves women have been empowered since the invasion. But the people of Basra say it is a smokescreen. Any woman who becomes a part of the system, they say, is incapable of engineering any change for the better. Posters around the city promoting the constitution graphically illustrate that view. The faces of

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

the women candidates have been blacked out, the accompanying slogan, "No women in politics," a stark reminder of the opposition they face.

Ms Aziz said: "Women members of the Provincial Council had many dreams but they were told 'With respect, you don't know anything. This is a world of men. Your view is good but not better.' More and more they just agreed to sign whatever they were told. We have got women in power, who are powerless."

Many of the British officers in Basra say they feel "uncomfortable" with the situation but a spokesman for the Foreign Office would only say: "As part of the new government's programme, they do say in their top 10 items to be looked at that women constitute half of society and are nurturers of the other half and, therefore, must take an active role in building the society and the state. Their rights should be respected in all fields."

In the villages around Basra, the shy women who peer round doorways are uncomplaining. For one Marsh Arab, Makir Jafar, the fact she has been given enough education to help her 10-year-old son with his homework is enough. "Life is nice. There is the river. I do not want for anything," she said.

There is a growing fear among educated women, however, that the extreme dangers of daily life will allow the issue of women's oppression to remain unchallenged. In Mrs Kareem's words: "Men have been given a voice. But women will not get their part in building this country."

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United States is No Help to Iraqi Women

by Bonnie Erbe

A new poll of leaders of Iraqi women's-rights groups finds that women were treated better and their civil rights were more secure under deposed President Saddam Hussein than under the faltering and increasingly sectarian U.S.-installed government.

This is doubly troubling. It's troubling first because the Bush administration used the issue of women to justify its now widely criticized invasion of Iraq in part by promising to improve the situation of women.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation

BRussells Tribunal Dossier



It's troubling second because the administration has issued news releases, held public meetings and tried to gain media attention (as well as U.S. public support) for all the "good" it's supposedly doing the women of Iraq via this invasion.

The poll was released last week by the Integrated Regional Information Networks, a U.N. news agency covering sub-Saharan Africa, eight countries in central Asia, and Iraq.

IRIN reports the survey findings as follows: "... women's basic rights under the Hussein regime were guaranteed in the constitution and more importantly respected, with women often occupying important government positions. Now, although their rights are still enshrined in the national constitution, activists complain that, in practice, they have lost almost all of their rights."

Moreover, leaders of women's groups say that in Iraq's new government, more men in power follow conservative Sharia (to wit, Islamic law) on women's rights and on their role in society. Senar Muhammad, president of the Baghdad-based non-government organization Woman Freedom Organization, is quoted by IRIN as saying, "When we tell the government we need more representation in parliament, they respond by telling us that, if well-qualified women appear one day, they won't be turned down. ... Then they laugh at us."

The report says more men are ordering women to "take the veil" (wear coverings from head to toe), and fewer women are working in professional jobs than when Saddam was in power.

Why did we not hear this news first from the Bush administration? Perhaps because the administration is too busy trying to put a positive "spin" on the situation in Iraq. A quick tour of the White House's own Web site reveals the administration has plenty of time to promote the kind of Iraqi women's events that make it look good. In November 2003, President Bush's public-relations personnel staged a photo op with female members of Iraq's Governing Council.

Bush is quoted as saying, "It's been my honor to host one of the most extraordinary meetings I've had as the president of the United States. I'm seated here with five courageous, brave Iraqi women who believe in the people of Iraq, believe in the future of Iraq, who love their freedoms, who look forward to working to see that their nation is a free and peaceful country." Seems this item is in need of a bit of updating.

Please don't take this news as an endorsement on my part of Saddam's regime. He was a bloodlust-ful dictator who deserves the same treatment he visited on dissidents: torture and death. But, that does not mean that some things were not better for Iraqis while he was in power.

Iraqi Women Under Occupation



BRussells Tribunal Dossier

He ran a functioning government that put down civil strife, kept basic services in place (water, sewer, electric), and he gave women more freedom than they've had since the U.S.-installed government took over.

Oh, and I'm sure the black-helicopter types (the guys who go rabid at the mention of the United Nations) will have a field day discrediting IRIN's report. But given that anti-U.N. types were the same guys who got us into the Iraq invasion in the first place, who has more credibility now? I vote for IRIN as the lesser of two evils.

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