

Social Change and Social Illness in Iraq: Co-Existent or Elimination?

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Abstract

Iraq is the country who has an abundance of what brings its rise and fall; sun, oil, rivers and wars.

The sun shines three hundred and sixty five days a year, it does not rest not even on the Sabbath; however, it fails to illuminate the darkness's which shroud religious and racial discrimination among its people. The oil brings invaders from both inside and out, invaders who assumed the Iraqi people did not have the capability to reach the rational of conserving their treasure. The intruders obtain it all, keeping it all for them and leaving the Iraqi nation starving and vulnerable.

The rivers flow with a gentle nature from the tip of the north to the last grains of sand, which cover the south, never exploited for their profitable capabilities. Iraq has fought single wars which equate to more time than both world wars, yet the grieving period was by far the shortest. Wars that have left men, women and even children physically disabled as well as mentally handicapped due to the extremities and suffering caused.

The totalitarianism, superstructure and prolonged international sanction also led to the demise of the value system, deforming the structure of society beyond repair. This has resulted in what cannot be described as anything more than sheer abnormality and social illness.

The Problem

Soon after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq witnessed a sharp and unprecedented social change. It was a drastic shock, which turned the social system as a whole upside down. The change penetrated the roots of the Iraqi social system, not the morphological phase alone.

The student of sociology and particularly social change may understand that dramatic change in social structure could take place as a result of radical modification of the material aspects of social life. The following changes in system may be slower and have less effect on the existing normative framework. However, the changes that took place in Iraq came slowly, very slowly, and gradually under the darkness of international law using the pretext of the Kuwait problem to impose the hardest and the harshest sanctions ever in the history of human kind. Some people naively think that the international community imposed sanctions to drag Saddam Husain out of Kuwait, but the reality is that they put 25 million Iraqis, including women, children and the elderly, under siege; nothing going and coming out, in order to maintain a systematic campaign of "*brain drain*" from Iraq and stop the scientific development. Saddam ambition went far beyond what he was allowed, by all means. The trick of Kuwait in co-ordination with the passive role of our cousins achieved its objective of wiping out Iraq and dragging him out of history.

Aims

In this paper, the researcher will try to make a combination of historical, functional and structural analysis to the pre-war and after war chaos, changes, and illness.

Methods

Most of our knowledge about social life can be obtained from direct observation, but scientific information needs certain criteria to validate the collected information in order to reduce bias and achieve objectivity

(Borg 1963:237). Bilton et al (2002:456) argues that, *"close observation of social action and even full participation in it are often the preferred methods of social research among interpretivists"*. In this paper the researcher carefully observed the dramatic changes in the Iraqi social system over a decade and wrote down essential points that directly obliterate the value system

The rapid change; the slow change

Alvin Toffler (1971) in his well known book 'future shock' stated:

Early in March 1967, in Eastern Canada, an eleven year old child died of old age. Ricky Gallant was only eleven years old chronologically but he suffered from an odd disease called "progeria" advanced ageing, he exhibited many characteristics of a ninety year old man. The symptoms of progeria are senility hardened arteries, baldness, and slack and wrinkled skin. In effect Ricky was an old man when he died, a long lifetime of biological change having been packed into eleven short years.

(p27)

The case of Ricky Gallant is quite rare, but it is true and we can use it metaphorically, to indicate that in a very short time (less than two decades) the changes in social structure and social functions in Iraq were beyond the imagination; the normative system, including the values, the traditions, the daily habits, all collapsed, declined or shrank. The changes that penetrated the whole social system started with the most vulnerable

and significant unit of society, the family. What has happened to the family was more than what happened to Ricky Gallant. The society “become *something other than and different from what it originally was*” (Beattie 1985, p. 247). In effect the inherited value system, which is responsible for transmitting the sense of right and wrong, good and bad, desirable and otherwise, through the socialization process from one generation to another, vanished within two decades or so. Simply stated, the values adhered to by the local community for thousands of years, such as respecting, defending, exchanging food, supporting each other, sharing happiness and sadness took an ill-turn, and was completely reversed. Neighbours became victims of neighbours. A secret report to the secret police could send a neighbour or friend or work colleague beyond the sun. Social interaction became more formal and friends or relatives no longer trusted each other. Two factors contributed to shape the deformed interactions:

1. The harsh sanction of the international community, which aimed to isolate the Iraqis and keep them under the starvation policy as long as possible. The starvation policy encouraged some fair scholars to speak out and describe it as human catastrophe. (Goodman 2004)
2. The totalitarian political system, which shaped the social structure according to its objectives and squeezed the Iraqis’ freedom and correlated everything in the community to loyalty to the regime, led to a policy of fear, everybody watching everybody, nobody safe nobody out of the reach of secret comrades’ reports.

Both factors overlapped and played a fundamental role in destroying the Iraqi personality; the starvation policy which has been sustained for more than a decade, forcing the vast majority of Iraqis to eat sawdust as bread, would be enough to stimulate the animal aspect of human nature. Humans will leap beyond social norms and values in order to satisfy their biological needs. With starvation, the normative criteria of the social system become meaningless. The common proverb in this context is *"feed me first then ask me about the human virtues"*. The civilized nations by no means achieved unprecedented success. They significantly applied Maslow's needs theory (Lloyd and Mayes 1986) to turn the Iraqis behaviour in accordance with their plans: killing, robbing, looting, defamation and dissimulation.

On the other hand, the totalitarian regime that encouraged people to watch and report on each other in order to save and prolong the regime's life severely affected the Iraqi personality. Indeed under the policy of *"watch and report"* which was often associated with rewards (mainly financial), some people only tried to prove their loyalty to the regime to keep themselves and their families safe and secure. In this sense safety (security in Maslow's hierarchy of needs) became a priority, hand by hand with the biological needs.

The Combined Outcomes

The outside harsh sanction and the inside hard control made the Iraqi psychological well-being vulnerable and very sensitive, which in turn was reflected strongly in their behaviour; they became impatient and short tempered. The accumulation of pressures as a result of lack of satisfaction

of social, economic and biological needs exacerbated the short temper among the ordinary people, and that may explain why Iraqis start shouting and get angry so quickly if the other side produce a different opinion in a discussion of common issues or ordinary topics. There is no smooth response to others, whatsoever, even among the highly educated people. The practice of discussing things loudly could be explained as a cry of protest against the self, others, the oppressors and the wrong path of socialization. This would affect the personality and create a constant psychological disability; the child who listens to such discussion between parents, friends or relatives may be frightened, and such an uncomfortable experience is unconsciously stored and affects the child's confidence. This also could explain why the vast majority of Iraqi children are often shy and have a lack of confidence to express themselves among others, especially in formal situations such as school, or with adult relatives, while they are so brave before the mirror.

Superiority Vs Inferiority

The sense of frustration which often comes from the pressures of the lack of satisfaction of the fundamental needs, and the very short temper which is a result of fear and a natural response to powerful forces, could lead to internalised the aggressiveness, which will directed against all objects and sources of the non-comfortable experience. This internalised aggressiveness would not only crystallise the sense of inferiority to the powerful forces, including political, financial and educational authorities. Unconsciously, the suppressed individual feels not only inferior, but crushed, segmented and deeply deprived. Such feelings are consciously

denied and the individual may express totally the opposite; some pretend that they are very determined, courageous, and challenging. In some cases an inferiority complex will lead to:

1. Obsessive feeling of depreciation of the individual's abilities, which often leads to a permanently and extremely contentious personality;
2. ego-distension, which refer to individuals who always overestimate themselves, their knowledge, talents and cleverness, while they are in reality shallow, selfish and untalented.

This type of personality is certainly abnormal, because objective assessment is not applied and such traits would undermine the possibility of normal coexistence with others.

These traits seem to be common among the vast majority of the Iraqis. The problem is not with those who are suppressed or those who have ego-distension, but with those who have these traits internalised and find themselves in power whether political, economic or religious power. They waste no time in expressing ultimate authority, oppressing others and playing a superior role that does not suit them as they used to play an inferior role. The superior-inferior equation is really sophisticated; it is a game like the Robinson Crusoe-Friday game in Daniel Defoe's novel. In reality, the new forces that criticised the totalitarian regime and mobilised forces to encounter it, they significantly practice the same role. Indeed the abuse of power is common among the human race unless culturally restricted or controlled, and the victim of yesterday could be more aggressive than the headsman, especially when the power seizers are not

qualified for power. In this case the result would be more dead bodies in the streets, more roadside bombs in the crowded marketplaces, and more looting from the public funds.

Superstructure- Infrastructure and Social-Structure

In Iraq there are no classes, no ladder of stratification at least for the last fifty years, except for those in powerful positions. The classes are often crystallised by the production system. Iraq for the last five decades imported its food from abroad; grains, soap, sugar, tea, rice, etc. So the production system was paralysed, and the economy of the whole nation depends on oil. If the oil wells dried tomorrow the nation would starve to death. Even the trade sector which could produce fairly wealthy elite was kept under control, because the regime understood that financial power could seriously threaten the regime authority and stability. Thus, the regime's stamped on the national media and the big business and enjoyed the support of the starving people who try to show that they followed the regime as the only source of living, security and safety. Such support had been proven to be false, since as soon as the regime started shaking, the supporters vanished, with handful cash, and the starving supporters turned back and started killing each other. Accordingly, the totalitarian superstructure was a system built on a sand base; no classes, no economic standpoint and no solid value system, and significantly no respect for human life; one could disappear for a false report, including disliking the only leader, or recently the only gang leader or party leader or pigs leader. There Used to be one leader and everybody knew the red lines, but

recently there are hundreds, maybe thousands of leaders and the ordinary citizen does not know who is to follow, because one cannot stay neutral.

Neither the previous nor the present regimes were qualified to lead a rich country like Iraq because the qualified people (in humanitarian, political, ethical, cultural and educational terms) have been dragged outside the national soil. No one, before or now, could say something against the leader(s) otherwise he/she will be eliminated, car bombed (accidentally), assassinated (by person unknown), kidnapped (by gangs) or left as a dead body in the street, sometime with no head. The super structure that has run the country for nine years cannot supply people with minimum human needs, after nine years running a rich country they cannot offer electricity, petrol and domestic fuel, there must be something wrong. The qualified people get out, selling their brains; the young labours are forced out to sell their labour or their bodies, with their dignity, very cheap. Indeed this situation was created on purpose, to keep the people running after satisfaction of their basic needs, especially security, and biological needs, so they cannot think about anything else. This policy was practised in the early days of Saddam's regime, when they played the game of the "*axe man*" who spread terror in Baghdad for months, while the regime was secretly killing its opponents. Is history repeating itself? It certainly is.

Conclusion

The lesson learned from the contemporary history of Iraq is that the social structure, the value system and the ethical standards have been dramatically changed, as a direct result of regional wars, international sanctions and totalitarian control. These forces worked together to make

a huge crack in the whole social system. In a system where a teacher does not earn enough to feed his children, the doctor works as a shop assistant and a high ranking army officer works as a taxi driver, to obtain extra income. When the sex trade flourishes in a conservative society and when a child has to leave school and join the labour market to support his disabled parents, the society must reach a critical stage of decline. The elite left and are scattered all over the world, or were forced to leave. Hundreds of thousands of young Iraqis killed in wars, or by the bullets of the secret police, left behind millions of widows, orphans, disabled and elderly with no future certainty. It is a gloomy picture but that is what happening on the ground.

Moreover, the relationship between the superstructure and the society has always, for a long time, been based on a reciprocal suspicion. They do not trust each other, and such relations would never build a civilized nation. This was evident, during and after the American invasion.

For all the above reasons, I think, Iraqis are in a civil war. Despite the pain, the victims and the human misery, they eventually have to appreciate the peaceful coexistent and peaceful exchange of power. No one, after all this blood-shed, should cling to the throne of power, and the concept of power itself, must be changed and must be viewed as a temporary job, not for life.

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التغير الاجتماعي والأمراض الاجتماعية في العراق :- تعايش أم إلغاء ؟

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ملخص البحث :-

يمتلك العراق كل مقومات النهوض والانحطاط في آن واحد، الشمس ، والنفط ، والأنهار والحروب.

الشمس تشرق ثلاثمائة وخمس وستون يوماً في السنة ، لاتغيب أبداً ، ومع ذلك فإنها فشلت في إزالة الظلمة التي استحكمت في نفوس الناس عرقياً ومذهبياً . النفط جلب لنا الغزاة من الخارج والداخل ، الغزاة الذين افترضوا ان العراقيين لم ينضجوا بما فيه الكفاية لاستثمار كنوزهم وان الغزاة ينبغي ان يأخذوا الكنز كله ، ثم يتركوا أهله جوعاً وبلاحمية. الأنهار تنساب بهدوء من أقصى قمة في الشمال الى آخر ذرة رمل في الجنوب ولكنها لم تستثمر ابداً .

العراق خاض حروباً واحدة منها تعادل الحربين العالميتين مجتمعيتين في طولها وخسائرها وتركت رجاله ونساءه وأطفاله وشيوخه معاقين بدنياً أو نفسياً .

الاستبداد ، والبناء الفوقي مع الحصار الاممي الطويل ، شوه المنظومة القيمية ومسح بناء المجتمع بما يصعب اصلاحه ، والنتائج لايمكن أن توصف بأقل من العلل والأمراض الاجتماعية .