

The Use of Projective Drawings to Determine Visual Themes in Young Kuwaiti Women Impacted by the Iraqi Invasion

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This pilot study is part of a larger qualitative research project which examines visual imagery created through projective art tasks by young Kuwaiti women who resided in Kuwait during the 1990 Saddam Hussein-led Iraqi invasion.

The purpose of this article is to present evidence from the pilot study while it evolves. This study uses projective drawing tasks to examine the mental schema (images, symbols and colors) of women between the ages of 17 to 21, who lived in Kuwait during the invasion.¹

Objective of the Study

In this pilot study, participants recall their experiences of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait during their preoperational stage within a selected environment, using visual art to construct image, symbolic and color themes. Participants were between the ages of four and five during the 1990 invasion. According to Ridha and Orlin, "Kuwait was invaded and brutally occupied by Iraqi troops for seven months in 1990-91. During this period, the Iraqi forces looted museums, libraries, hospitals, and individual homes; destroyed schools, houses, buildings, water and electricity stations, and communication systems" (1). The childhood innocence of the participants was tested by circumstances beyond their control. The invasion "constitutes a man-made disaster of considerable proportions" (Hadi 3) and may have created traumatic experiences beyond the verbal descriptions of children.

Characteristics of the preoperational stage of development include a child's increased use of symbols in playing and pretending. Objects and images are used to represent words. Additionally, the egocentric propensities of this developmental stage cause children to believe they are the center of the universe. They do not possess the ability to see the world through another's view (Inhelder, Caprona, & Cornu-Wells 3 and 69) and may still rely on sensorimotor reasoning abilities. In a framework of Piaget-based developmental theories and the impact of a man-made disaster, projective drawing tasks in this pilot study are used to create a visual language of pre-verbal memories. A projective task is one in which a person responds to or provides ambiguous, abstract, or unstructured stimuli, often in the form of pictures or drawings. Projective art tasks require the participants to create pictures themselves. Many researchers (Denny, Drachnik, Koppitz, Landgaren, and Naumburg) have used these tasks to "elaborate visual, nonverbal therapeutic approaches that provide symbolic equivalent for groups seeking a common theme" (Pepin-Wakefield 50). The results of projective art tasks are often two-fold: first, participants are able to visually represent memories, and second, researchers can find common themes in groups of individuals who may have or have had similar experiences.

Background of the Study

A wealth of material has been written about post traumatic stress syndrome and increased psychopathology particular to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Al-Naser & Sandman; Al-Shatti; Hadi & Llabre; Ridha & Orlin). The Kuwait government's Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences has sponsored many research projects dealing with repercussions of the Iraqi invasion. While some of these studies may have used art-making as a non-

verbal indicator of Post Traumatic Shock Disorder, none has examined the development of themes associated with art-making.

Research Methods

Participants met for three consecutive Thursday afternoons in the drawing studio at Kuwait University's College for Women. For the purpose of this report, only two sessions will be discussed. The third session used previously illustrated materials to construct a collage and did not involve drawing. All participants signed a document which was read to them explaining the process and that they were participating of their own free will and could leave at any time.

Criteria for participation in this pilot study were that subjects had to be between the ages of 17 and 21 and living in Kuwait at the time of, and remaining through the 1990 Iraqi invasion and subsequent liberation. The five participants in this pilot study were 18 or 19 years old, students at Kuwait University's College for Women and spoke English as a second language.

Each session lasted two hours and participants were all provided with the same materials: high-quality, water-soluble oil pastel and colored pencils, indelible ink brushes and varied gauges of ink pens used on 9" x 12" water color blocks. The media allowed for uniformity and malleability, while the block allowed for stability. All materials were demonstrated, then placed on a table central to each subject's drawing desk to be used freely. Finished art-work was placed by the participant in her folder to instill a sense of ownership.

At the first session participants were asked to complete two tasks. Respondents are designated by a capital letter, H, I J, K, L, to preserve anonymity. All quoted responses are verbatim and have not been edited for grammar mistakes.

Task 1

- A. Mix a color of how you remember the invasion as a child.
- B. Give it a name.
- C. Briefly write about why you created this specific color.

Task 2

- A. Use any media and create an overall memory of the invasion. Use your paper in any direction, fill it in any way and mix media, if you choose. Ask for additional paper if necessary.

Responses to Task 1

"L" used water soluble oil crayon to create four swatches of mixed color. She titled each one and wrote a description beneath each color. These were her outcomes:

"Smoking Black," is a three-inch variegated and scratched for relief, grey and black square. "It reminds me of the dirty sky mixed with the smoke that comed out from the fires..." "Blood," is a pure splash of red. She wrote, "Just pain for the Kuwaiti people." "Oil in the Sea," is a mix of dark blue, green and wash. "The mixing of petrol with sea during the Invasion..." "Desert," is a pure line of cadmium yellow supporting a dark blend of ochre and black. "The nature was ruined..." was her inscription next to this color.

"I" placed four pure swatches in the middle of her paper, reading warm to cool from the right. These were her color descriptions: Deep Cadmium Red, "The room that we were living in." Bright Ochre, "The place that we were play in color of sand." A light green wash was entitled, "Marbles," and next a more saturated green she wrote, "Green book store, the name of the stories that we were reading."

"G" made five thin streaks of pure colors above the same number that she mixed in oval patches. She only labeled the thin examples. These were her color descriptions: Black, "sadness-evil," Green, "this express how does Kuwaiti people work with each other." Red is the "Blood." Yellow, "preseners [prisoners]. Brown, is a "sign of the burn of the petral [oil]."

"K" Mixed three, three-quarter moon shapes on the left-hand side of the page: brown, red and blue each mixed with black. These were her color descriptions: Brown refers to desert, red to blood and blue to sea. "I mix all of these colors with black because at that time everything are black and the black refer to sad."

"H" mixed blue, green and brown together and next to the color blend wrote, "Everything, earth, sea, sky land is mixed up. People do not know the land they were born in any more and then you cannot see because of the smokes."

Responses to Task 2

"L's" drawing used the same saturated colors defined in her memory color (see fig. 1). Through black bars, the viewer sees a ball and chain, shackles, and red (symbolic blood) flows down from the ceiling. To the right is what appears as a warm grey tunnel, the entrance rimmed with green. In the distance is a horizontal burnt sienna background and upper stretch of blue, bisected by barren black tree limbs and a root system that drips down into the

next frame containing what looks like a pool of blood and a black ball and chain. The green in the upper right quadrant flows down into the lower left quadrant into small black/yellow mounds and what appear to be headstones. Later, "L" explains that the "Green is the curtain around the window I see from."



Fig. 1. Task 2 outcome, Participant "L".

Like the others in this first session "J" and "K" used memory colors to depict similar images, like black bars, brick walls, the Kuwaiti flag, burning oil or oil wells (see figs. 2 and 3, respectively).



Fig. 2. Task 2 outcome, Participant "J".



Fig. 3. Task 2 outcome, Participant "K".

Session 2

The atmosphere in the second session was much livelier than the first. This might have been because participants were more familiar with each other now, or it was the nature of the second task: it focused on childhood objects as opposed to memories of the invasion. In Session 2, participants were re-directed to create a single memory color and also asked to illustrate a childhood memory. Before beginning the first task, participants' desks were separated to avoid influence.

Task 1

- A. Draw a single memory color.
- B. Label it.

Task 2

- A. Draw what you remember yourself being surrounded by during the invasion.

Responses to Task 1

With the exception of "J", who made a small orange, yellow-tailed comet in the upper right corner of her page, "It is the anger," she explained, all of the other colors were dark.

"H" created a washed muddy, lavender sphere and on the left hand side of the paper she wrote in pencil:

When I was first asked of what color I thought of at the mention of "the invasion" I thought "BROWN"!! I didn't know why, but after I put it on paper I began to realize I have all these images of soldiers passing in front of our house. Somehow I remember my mother's fear; any second one of these soldiers will walk toward our house. At one point dozens of tanks were lined up right in front of our house, literally!! Everyone tried to hide the truth, but I knew, somehow. The darkness of the basement luminated solely by two or three candles made that gloomy brown shine- it was the definition of terror.

"L's" drawing, like the others, is a mix of black, brown and red, a muddy, warmly ominous color. Underneath the single color she wrote, "The first thing that comes to my mind of the invasion is the smoking sky filled with pollution and the people who suffered, red reminds me of those people who had kids killed, father, mothers or friends. Also the seen of dead animals on ground."

Responses to Task 2

"H": "I've forgotten all of this until I started to draw. Now, I am remembering things I did not remember before. This is really amazing. My first memory is of this room. It is dark and there are all these people, my mother's sisters sleeping in my bedroom."

Her drawing represents three separate motifs (see fig. 4). In the center bottom is a dark gray square containing white silhouettes, beside which she has written, "My room, packed w/ relatives. Our house was a shelter for most of the family." Dark blue surrounds two white chairs and a small table with a single candle atop. "The room in front of the balcony out of which our future could be pre-determined."²



Fig. 4. Task 2 outcome, Participant "H".

The third drawing is in the left hand corner of the paper. It depicts the penciled outline of a woman whose thin waist is wrapped by a belt holding knives. She has points for hands, and seven gapped teeth which stick out of pencil-thin lips. She has a frizz of burnt sienna hair. Five large red drops fall from the sharp point of a triangular shape held by the end of her arm. To the left of the drawing "H" has written: "Om il sa'af wa Leef."³ "The myth I believed to be true until two years ago." The myth, she explained, was told to her by an uncle when she was a child during the invasion:

There was this Iraqi nurse who took care of children. During the invasion she stayed to help the Kuwaitis until she was captured and raped by the Iraqis. This made her go insane. So, then she gets a knife and she goes around killing children. We are all the time afraid to go outside, to go to sleep because she will come and kill us. Until two years ago I believe this. Until my uncle said it is just a story.

During Session 2 participants talked excitedly in English and Arabic about their childhood memories. Each participant's memory often triggered another's recall.

"K": "When the Iraqis come to our house I hide behind shelf. I can only see a little bit out of. The Iraqis come to take my uncle away. They are talking to my father. He gives them food, pushes the food out to them, with dates that are old [expired]. They don't know, because they cannot read."

"I" responded to "K's" memory: "The same in our house. They ask us for food and we give them soap. They do not know the difference." Other participants shared similar stories of Iraqis eating soap and cold cream thinking it was food.

"I" recalled other events: "We go to a man's house next to us and we pick all the knar [small fruit] from his tree and eat them. He is not there. So we just take what we want and we eat it all. Under the tree there is a red, how do you say? Bucket? Big bucket you use to wash clothes in?"

PI: "Tub?"

"I": Yes, tub. A red tub and my brother, he is only two years old, he sees it and sits down in it and does something very bad in it."

PI: "He goes to the bathroom."

"I": "Yes something like that," she says laughing.

"I's" drawing centers around a fully-leafed tree (see fig. 5). The objects of her childhood memories include books, marbles, a red tub, and red carpet laden with an Arabic coffee service and food. Seven children at the bottom of the picture are smiling and holding hands. Above them are a man and woman,

her parents, looking forlorn and weary. The male is wearing a striped blue shirt, the woman a red shirt. In the upper left hand corner are two books.

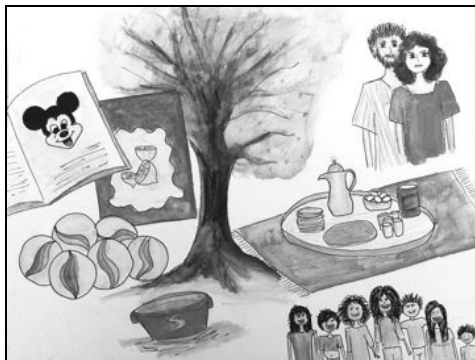


Fig. 5. Task 2 outcome, Participant "I".

"I": "I remember I am sitting holding the green book, my mother would read to us. I am looking at the pictures and can see in the mirror my mother she is crying. Our mothers they read to us to keep our mind off of what is happening."

"L": "This is why I like to read now." Her drawing is also family oriented (see fig. 6).

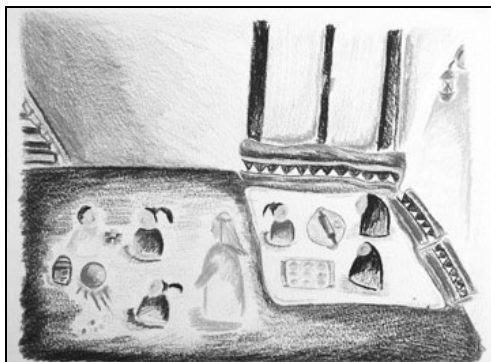


Fig. 6. Task 2 outcome, Participant "L".

All of the drawings contain multiple people and toys, and make reference to living in a basement, Except "J". She drew an egg-shaped head with the eyes and mouth bound by black bands (see fig.7).⁴ Broken chains hang from each side of the picture, a frayed rope flaps in front of the face surrounded by flames, yellow smoke and bricks.



Fig. 7. Task 2 outcome, Participant "J".

"J": "This is about how all the people they want to scream and to talk about the things that turn your heart into stone but they cannot. This is me." She explains the bricks in her picture "[They] represent the wall between me and the world. It is like a veil. The world cannot see me."

Results

Results of Session 1

In Session 1, participants tended to use blacks, browns and yellows as their memories were more of the after-affects of the invasion when the sky turned black from oil wells set on fire by retreating Iraqi forces.⁵

Symbolic images of the proverbial ball and chain, brick walls and black bars dominate nearly every composition. Since none of the participants actually saw a person chained or behind bars, these images can assumed to derive from mass-media portrayal of prisoners and prisons. The strongest real shared memory was of the smoke-filled environment (see figs. 1, 2, and 5).

Table 1.
Prevailing color themes from Participants in Session 1, Task 1.

Color Themes	Frequency	Occurrence
Red	4 of 4	100%
Dirty ochre	3 of 4	75%
Black	3 of 4	75%

Table 1 shows the use of each color in the four artwork samples and the percentage of occurrence. As for image themes, as stated, all the art-work included smoke, burning oil fields and/or dark sky. Table 2 details the symbolic themes generated from Session 1, Task 2.

Table 2
Prevailing color themes from Participants in Session 1, Task 2.

Symbolic Themes	Figure Numbers	Frequency	Occurrence
Ball and chain	1	1 of 3	33%
Kuwait flag	1, 2, 3	3 of 3	100%
Brick walls	1	1 of 3	33%
Prison bars	2	2 of 3	67%

Results of Session 2

Three major themes developed during this pilot study. These themes are evidenced by conversations and are supported by imagery created during the session.

1. Empathy or anger at Iraqi people;
2. Family solidarity and resulting feelings of security; and,
3. Insecurity.

Every participant could clearly recall the fear and sadness in the faces of their parents and other adults who tried to hide the reality of the invasion from them. "J" remembered, "When we were children, we thought that everything was okay. Not until we were adults do we realize what happen. I saw my first pictures of what they [Iraqis] did to people when I was 11 years old and cannot believe they do this when I was a child."

Fear was expressed in participant's drawings through dark colors, prison-oriented symbols, and dialogs between the PI and participants while completing the drawing tasks (see figs. 4 through 7). Other similar recollections involve basements where extended family congregated, ate and slept (see figs. 4, 5 and 6). The single color theme that evolved was warm brown. Symbolic images of toys and books are also visible in the artwork.

Conclusion

The drawing process enabled participants to express images and memories previously repressed during maturation. A number of colors, images and

symbols developed into themes through the projective art tasks. Participants also had noteworthy emotional responses during drawing sessions. For example, "H" stated, "I didn't know about my feelings until I started to draw. You get like a tingle when you remember. You were feeling like you were there doing those things again." "K" had a similar response. She stated, "[Drawing] make me go back 15 years ago and remember my memories." "J" added that, "When you draw, you talk about what makes you feel uncomfortable, and don't keep it in your heart all the time."

Furthermore, every participant indicated she felt more cautious about living "day by day," and that their parents were more protective. From a developmental perspective, participants' cognitive structure is strongly influenced by thoughts of "if it can happen once, it can happen again". They have persistent thoughts that history will repeat itself and jeopardize individual, family and national security. "H" commented, "There's always that fear that anything is going to happen. What we are experiencing now is a very comfortable life compared to other countries. It could go away any time."

Looked at separately one picture does not provide thematic evidence to support the study's investigation. However, when combined and assessed aggregately, color, image, and symbolic themes did develop. Further research and a larger research population will add validity to this pilot study. It will also provide evidence to explore visual mental schema associated with understanding and responding to experiences within a selected environment through art making.



Fig. 8. Example of Participant "J's" personal work.



Fig. 9. Example of Participant "J's" personal work.

Endnotes

- 1 - This research is supported by Kuwait University and is the first in the University's 39-year history to be classified under "Art Therapy." However, the PI is not a registered art therapist nor is the research intended to employ the therapeutic uses of art.
- 2 - After the session she invites me over to her family home for lunch. As we walk up steps of this palatial house I point to a window. "Is that the window you talk about in your drawing?" "No, it is there." She points to a bay window, two-stories high and says, "From there we could see if there were tanks or soldiers on the street."
- 3 - Literal translation is, "Mother with loufa skin and hair of palm fronds." This image is pre-Gulf war. It is an old Kuwaiti "boogeyman or woman" that was used to scare children.
- 4 - "J's" personal artwork is very similar to what she created in the session, which may account for the stark contrast between her work and the others' work (Figures 8 and 9 on following page).
- 5 - "Seven hundred and eighty-eight oil wells were sabotaged or set afire. Approximately two to three million barrels of crude oil, burned and unburned, were emitted daily during the war for over 300 days (KFAS 1998, p. 13).
- 6 - Al-Naser, Fahad, and Mark Sandman. *The Strength and Resiliency of the Kuwaiti Personality*. Kuwait: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences Research Project Directorate, 1998.

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استخدام الرسوم المصبرة لتحديد الموضوعات البصرية لدى الفتيات الكويتيات اللاتي شهدن الغزو العراقية

يوسفون واكفيلد

هذا البحث دراسة استطلاعية وجزء من مشروع بحث نوعي أكبر، يفحص المخيلة البصرية التي تصنعها أعمال فنية كلفت بها فتيات كويتيات شهدن الغزو الصدامي للكويت.

ويهدف البحث إلى تقديم الدليل على ذلك؛ إذ تتم الاستعانة بما كلفت به الفتيات من رسوم دالة لفحص الخارطة العقلية (صور، ورموز وألوان) للفتيات اللاتي تراوحت أعمارهن ما بين العشرين والثانية والعشرين، وبقين في الكويت في أثناء الغزو.