

By Dahr Jamail  
Photo by Molly Bingham

# Who Are the Insurgents?

**S**UPPOSE IRAQ INVADED AMERICA. And an Iraqi soldier was on a tank passing through an American street, waving his gun at the people, threatening them, raiding and trashing houses. Would you accept that? This is why no Iraqi can accept occupation, and don't be surprised by their reactions," says "The Imam," a young man from a mixed Sunni-Shia family, as he explains the genesis of the insurgency in Iraq and its exponential growth.

He is one of the protagonists that *Meeting Resistance* presents as unmistakable evidence that the root cause of the conflict in Iraq is the occupation itself. The film has resistance fighters themselves tell their story.

Journalists-turned-filmmakers Molly Bingham and Steve Connors were compelled to film this documentary during their early reporting of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. They used the al-Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad to explore and depict an insurgency that has been caricatured by the Bush Administration.

Bingham, who has reported previously from Rwanda, the Gaza Strip, and Iran, was the official photographer to the Office of the Vice President of the United States from 1998 to 2001. She believes that it is imperative to understand the people within the resistance if the United States is to find a solution to the Iraq quagmire.

Bingham teamed up with Connors, a photographer who has covered ten conflicts and is a former British soldier who served in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s. Between the two of them they share thirty-three years of experience in covering conflicts around the globe.

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*Dahr Jamail is the author of the recently released book "Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq." Jamail spent eight months reporting from Iraq, and has been covering the Middle East for over four years for the Inter Press Service, The Sunday Herald, Foreign Policy in Focus, and The Independent, among others.*



In August of 2003, they began working on the film. The project kept them in Baghdad for ten months, as Connors filmed and Bingham wrote the script.

The eighty-five-minute groundbreaking film focuses on ten members of the Iraqi resistance. Interspersed with stunning footage of the aftermath of car bomb attacks, of frightened soldiers aiming their weapons at crowds of Iraqis, and of burning remains of destroyed military vehicles, the meat of the film is the words of the fighters themselves.

"I felt a fire in my heart," one of them recounts. "When they occupied Iraq, they subjugated me, subjugated my sister, subjugated my mother, subjugated my honor, my homeland. Every time I saw them I felt pain. They pissed me off, so I started working [in the resistance]."

The complex nature of their lives speaks to the intricacies of the Iraqi resistance.

"The Teacher," for instance, is married with three children, and always loathed the Ba'ath Party.

"The Wife" is a Shiite woman who works as a courier, carrying messages and weapons between groups when she is not watching her two children.

Other members, Sunni and Shia alike, work as consultants, weapon producers, and strategists.

In the spring of 2004, a twenty-six-year-old photographer in Baghdad told me in an interview that "this is not a rebellion, this is a resistance against the occupation. The media concentrates on the Americans, and does not care about Iraqis." He had been opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein, and had even welcomed the U.S. invasion, but had quickly grown weary of watching his fellow countrymen humiliated and killed by the occupiers. Like the people in *Meeting Resistance*, he had subsequently taken up arms.

Connors understands this frustration toward Western media coverage of the occupation.

"A major weapon in the arsenal of a modern military is the use of information operations," he says. "These operations, which often take the form of misinformation or disinformation, are directed as much at the enemy population as it is at our own population, without whose support the military cannot continue to execute a war."

He aims to counteract this propaganda.

"To place an opponent like the Iraqi resistance in the human space of ordinary people defending their right to self-determination is to challenge our view of ourselves as liberators," says Connors.

While laying bare the motivations of the resistance, the film also does a forceful job of dispelling other myths.

One of the interviewed, referred to as "The Republican Guard" since he was a career officer in Saddam Hussein's military, is a Sunni married to a Shia woman. "The Sunni and Shia

are bound together by blood and family ties," he explains. "I am married to a Shia, my sister is married to a Shia. I can't kill my own children's uncles or kill my wife, the mother of my children."

One scene includes a butcher hacking away at a side of beef. "Iraq is our homeland, it's our Iraq," he says. "If you don't defend your land, you will not defend your honor."

The film recognizes that the resistance has the tacit support of a large percentage of the population, even though the Bush Administration doesn't acknowledge this.

"The Administration chooses to portray people who oppose their will in Iraq as terrorists or extremists who live on the fringes of Iraqi society, isolated from their own countrymen," says Bingham. "Without doubt some individuals involved in attacking U.S. troops are 'extreme' in their beliefs, and they are relentless fighters in the pursuit of their goals, but they are very human and very much part of the social structure of Iraqi society, and move within it. If we removed the context of occupation—in all its forms—from Iraq, most of them would stand down and return to their lives."

Aside from screenings at international film festivals and numerous private and public shows, Connors and Bingham screened the film at West Point, the U.S. Marine Corps staff college at Quantico, and Baghdad.

Bingham feels that the film represented a radically different perspective to the military personnel who viewed it.

"The bulk of the people were taking on new information that was a dramatic paradigm shift for them," she says. "To see their enemy as largely fighting for their homeland because of nationalism and religion, rather than being terrorists, is a big deal." ♦

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