

Institution: SOAS
Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies
Title of case study: Relieving the Crisis in Iraqi Higher Education Through Women & Gender Studies (Nadje Al-Ali)
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>More than twenty years of sanctions and war have decimated all areas of Iraqi society, including its higher education sector. In this context, the work of Professor Nadje Al-Ali has countered conservative forces pursuing Iraqi reconstruction in ways that explicitly marginalise women. Drawing on her research on women's rights in Iraq and beyond, Al-Ali has worked to raise consciousness of how perspectives informed by gender theory can contribute to a more equitable reconstruction of Iraqi civil society. Through in-country and regional training of academics and women's rights activists, and mentoring numerous Iraqi research projects, Al-Ali has substantially progressed the promotion of women's rights and gender-based equality in Iraq.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Al-Ali studied and worked in Cairo before completing a PhD at SOAS in 1998. She then held posts at Sussex and Exeter before returning to SOAS in September 2007 as a lecturer in gender studies. The following year she became Chair of the interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS, which, uniquely, promotes the study of gender in relation to Asia, Africa and the Middle East. She became Professor in September 2010.</p> <p>Al-Ali's work on gender in the Middle East, and particularly that published while at SOAS since 2007, focuses on how war, conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and political transition in Iraq have negatively impacted on women. She authored the first modern history of Iraqi women, <i>Iraqi Women</i> (output a below), a book that tracks the political and social history of Iraq from the post-colonial period through American invasion in 2003 and subsequent occupation. The emergence of a women's movement in Iraq in the 1950s, Saddam Hussein's policy of state feminism and the strengthening of conservative, Islamist forces in the years either side of the turn of the 21st century are examined successively – demonstrating that far from the 'Liberation' touted in Western propaganda, the invasion, war and occupation have in fact led to a marked retrenchment of women's rights in Iraq.</p> <p>The situation of women during the occupation, treated in the final chapter of <i>Iraqi Women</i>, became a focus of collaboration with Professor Nicola Pratt of Warwick, resulting in <i>What Kind of Liberation?</i> (output b). This book extended and further evidenced the argument that war and occupation and their attendant militarism, violence, economic and social degradation, and mounting sectarianism and religious zeal have dramatically worsened women's lives and short-term prospects of equality in the country. The research hinges on interviews with Iraqi women's rights activists, international policy makers and NGO workers, highlighting an important feature of Al-Ali's research: The employment of qualitative research methods that seek to chronicle the very human effects of the increasing marginalisation of women from all areas of civil society and political decision-making in Iraq, and chart how this occurs.</p> <p>Broader, regionally focussed exploration of the effects of war on women's lives in the Middle East was also pursued together with Pratt in the co-edited <i>Women and War in the Middle East</i> (output c).</p> <p>More recent research reports stem from projects working with women in academe in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan (outputs d and e), which Al-Ali has co-authored with two sets of project participants. The process of researching and drafting the reports enabled female Iraqi academics themselves to investigate the ways in which gender has shaped their own professional experience and the opportunity to set forth recommendations to improve fairness and equitable treatment. Their</p>

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dissemination at authors' home institutions and beyond worked to increase awareness and sensitivity of the issues facing female academics. These reports illustrate the mutually reinforcing nature of Al-Ali's research and her activism: One fuels the other, strengthening the impetus of each.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London: Zed Books, 2007.
Translated into Kurdish as: *ژێرمه‌ی ئات مو- ١٩٤٨ ل ناگهوارتوهن هه‌که‌وری چ.. قاری ع ینان ژ*. Sulaimaniya, Iraq: National Center For Gender Research, 2013.
- b. and Nicola Pratt. *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation in Iraq*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- c. and Nicola Pratt, eds. *Women & War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives*. London: Zed Books, 2009.
- d. et al. "Female Iraqi Academics In Post-Invasion Iraq: Roles, Challenges & Capacities" (2012). Research Report available at: http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/13613/3/FInal_report_revised_-_long_version.pdf
- e. et al. "Female Iraqi Academics In Iraqi Kurdistan: Roles, Challenges & Capacities" (2012). Research Report available at: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/id/eprint/13494>
- f. et.al. "We Don't do Numbers! Reimagining Gender and Selves." In *Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in Post-Conflict Enquiry*, edited by Heather Brunskell-Evans and Mihelle Moore, 39-52. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012.

Research grants that supported the work listed above include:

- British Council: DeIPHE Iraq Exploratory Grant: Capacity Building of Women and Gender Studies at Salahaddin University (2010), £8,500.
- British Council: DeIPHE Iraq Round One: Introducing Women & Gender Studies as an Important Academic Lens for Teaching, Research and Social Change (2010), £51,000.
- Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), Research Fellowship Programme: The Crisis in Iraqi Higher Education (2009-2011), £23,900.
- Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), Pathfinder University Grants Scheme (2008), £10,000.
- British Academy, Small Research Grant: Perpetrators or Victims of Violence? Men and Masculinities in the Iraqi Diaspora (2008-09), £7,500.

Output a was submitted to RAE 2008.

Outputs b and c are submitted to REF 2.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research capacity in Iraq is extremely weak. During sanctions of the 1990s, academics were denied new books, access to journals and opportunities to attend conferences or collaborate internationally. Since 2003, the situation for academics dramatically declined further with destruction of infrastructure, brain-drain, targeted assassinations, increasing sectarianism and a lack of training opportunities. In parallel, the situation of women in Iraq has also worsened, as Al-Ali's own research demonstrates. There have been increases in gender-based violence, women's

poverty, unemployment, legal discrimination, inadequate healthcare and education and restrictions on movement and behaviour. Within academe, female academics are systematically excluded from decision-making, research training and professional advancement. Paradoxically, the country's reconstruction requires – perhaps now more than ever – a robust research base to inform policy and legislation; the lack thereof is holding back advocacy and policy-making around women's education, political and workforce participation and legal rights, frustrating the country's potential to rebuild equitably and democratically.

Al-Ali has been working closely with female academics and women's rights activists in Iraq for more than five years to improve the research capacity of both individuals and institutions in ways that promote the creation of an evidence base to better inform advocacy, lobbying, decision and policy-making at local, national and international levels in relation to women's rights. Al-Ali has spearheaded several initiatives to fulfil these objectives, including Middle East Regional Roundtables on Gender (RRTs) and a Research Fellowship Programme with the collaboration and support of UK-based Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Amman (1, 2 and 6, below).

Since 2010 Al-Ali has co-organised and participated in six Regional Roundtables in Amman, Beirut and Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan (4). Each involves 20-35 participants of varied ethnic and religious backgrounds and generations drawn from Iraqi academe and civil society organisations, and academics and other stakeholders from across the Middle East. In November 2011, for example, a two-day RRT in Beirut involved six academics from departments at the University of Baghdad, the Head of Political Science at the University of Salahadeen in Erbil, and representatives from the Baghdad Women Association (5), the Jordanian Women's Union and the Beirut-based ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality amongst others. The events also provide an important networking opportunity and facilitate the sharing of experiences of those in the wider region with their Iraqi counterparts.

Al-Ali chairs the roundtables, which focus on gender and specific themes drawn directly from her research such as "Women Empowerment through Research" and "Linking Civil Society and Academia: The Relevance of Women and Gender Studies". In June 2012, a highly-pragmatic RRT in Erbil resulted in the creation of a working group tasked with preparing Iraq's first ever Shadow Report responding to the Iraqi Government's 1998 CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Report to the UN. In June 2013 the working group submitted a preliminary List of Issues to the CEDAW Committee in Geneva and the following month sent a delegation to Geneva to present oral evidence. The drafting of the Shadow Report is now underway.

Through the CARA-sponsored Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP), with additional funding from DelPHe and UN Women, Al-Ali delivered intensive, double-stranded training combining an introduction to the concepts, theories and applications of gender studies, particularly with reference to the specifics of the situation in Iraq and qualitative research methods, such as interviewing techniques, participant observations and life-story approaches (7, 8). On two projects each involving four Iraqi or Iraqi-exiled academics, Al-Ali mentored teams researching the problems and needs of female academics in higher education in Iraq and making recommendations to improve the situation. Dissemination of the resulting reports (outputs d and e) took place at the home universities of the participants, attracting hundreds of audience members, via online publication in English, Arabic and Kurdish, and, for one group, the publication of an English-language book chapter, "We Don't Do Numbers" in output f. Crucial to the projects' success was familiarising team members with international research standards and ensuring participants could employ qualitative research methods confidently and effectively in the hundreds of interviews with Iraqi female academics that underpinned the research.

The RRTs and IRFPs have developed strong, sustainable networks of researchers and activists working on women's issues in Iraq and the region. Both have also had very positive, unanticipated impacts: The success of the RRTs on Gender have provided a model for new RRTs on social sciences; IRPF participants have since successfully lobbied for a Gender Unit at the University of

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Baghdad and been commissioned to undertake further research by the Minister for Women. The success of the projects also supported further successful fundraising initiatives including garnering funds from the UN for more gender training and network building.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Kate Robertson, Deputy Executive Director and Iraq Programme Manager, CARA (Council for the Assistance of Academic Refugees).
2. Dr Martin Beck, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Amman, Jordan.
3. Head of Women's Empowerment Organization (WEO), Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan.
4. Professor, Department of Social Work, Salahedeen University, Erbil, Iraq
5. Representative of Baghdad Women's Association
6. Online links to information relating to some of the Regional Round Tables:
<http://www.kas.de/jordanien/en/publications/23288/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
<http://www.kas.de/jordanien/en/publications/29765/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
<http://www.kas.de/jordanien/en/publications/31901/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
<http://iwsaw1.lau.edu.lb/activities/2011/regional-roundtable-women-empowe.php> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
7. Information on the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP) and confirmation of Nadjé Al-Ali's funded project: <http://www.cara1933.org/RESEARCH-PROPOSALS.asp> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
8. Nadjé Al-Ali speaking about her IRFP project on Faculimedia.com:
<http://facultimedia.com/female-iraqi-academics-in-post-invasion-iraq-roles-challenges-capacities/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].