



CMRB
The Centre for Research on
Migration, Refugees and Belonging



The University of East London's **Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging (CMRB)** and SOAS' **Centre for Gender Studies** are pleased to announce the following seminar:

GENDER, FUNDAMENTALISM AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Saturday 30th April 2016, 2 - 5pm

**SOAS Brunei Gallery Building
(Room B102)**

Speakers:

Nazand Begikhani

Media, Gender and Honour:

The Cyber Representation of Women in Iraqi Kurdistan

Laila Alodaat

Syrian women combating violent extremism

Zahra Ali

Women's political activism in post-invasion Iraq:

Muslim feminists, Islamist women and the women between

Nadje Al-Ali

Beyond ISIS: Gender-based violence, militarism and authoritarianism

***Whilst there is no need to register for this event, please note that places are limited and will be offered on a first come first served basis on the day.**

Abstracts

Media, Gender and Honour: The Cyber Representation of Women in Iraqi Kurdistan

The media have become a powerful set of actors in Iraqi Kurdistan. Media outlets, whether they be the press, TV stations, radio or cyber platforms, have the capacity to both inform and allow for debate and deliberation, which in turn can play an important role in the processes of governance, ideological and cultural formation as well as decision-making. The new information communication technology and cyber media have shaped the lives of women and the interaction between people in Kurdistan. However, through media and cyber representation, women have been facing new challenges with different forms of violence founded on the very basis of the code of honour. The paper is based on field research into media, women and cyber violence conducted with colleagues at the University of Sulaimani's Gender & Violence Studies Centre between February and September 2015. The paper also includes data collected from previous research projects, notably a two year study into honour-based violence in Iraqi Kurdistan and UK Kurdish Diaspora (2008-2010) conducted by the University of Bristol's Centre for Gender & Violence Research and the University of Roehampton.

Dr. Nazand Begikhani is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Centre for Gender and Violence Research. She has over 20 years' experience in research, writing, advocacy for human rights and consultancy. In addition to 8 poetry collections as an international poet, some of Nazand's publications include, *Honour-based violence: Experiences and counter strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish diaspora* (Ashgate, 2015, co-authored with Gill & Hague); "Honour'-based violence in Kurdish communities" (With Gill & Hague, *Women's Studies International Forum*. 35(2). pp. 75–85); *Circulation of meaning* (Ranj Publications, Sulaimani 2008). Nazand addressed, among many conferences, the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, the UN's meeting with the World March of Women 2000, and Sweden's International Conference on Honour Killings (2004). She was awarded the Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize for her work on HBV in 2000, the Simone Landry French Feminine Prize for Poetry in 2012 and Kurdistan's Gender Equality Prize (2015).

Women's political activism in post-invasion Iraq: Muslim feminists, Islamist women and the women between

This presentation is based on my doctoral research on contemporary Iraqi women political activism in which I investigate socio-historically and ethnographically the articulation between gender and issues of nation, state and religion. My analysis of the post-invasion Iraqi context relies mainly on my ethnography of Iraqi women political groups conducted mainly in Baghdad and secondarily in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan) between October 2010 and June 2012 (participant observation, collect of life-stories and semi-structured interviews). I want to present some conceptual insights about the political and social use of Islam by women's rights activists in Iraq since 2003, and about my own personal and intellectual evolution on the matter throughout the completion of my fieldwork research. I will seek to contextualize and apply an intersectional reading of what is commonly called "Islamic" or "Muslim", and insist on the importance to ground the analysis of Iraqi women's rights activism in their material context of deployment and expression. In doing so, I seek to propose a critical intersectional feminist reading of contemporary Islamist and Muslim feminist forms of activism.

Dr Zahra Ali is a sociologist specializing in women and gender studies in relation to Islam and the Middle East and currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Chester and a research associate at IFPO-Iraq. Her doctoral research was supervised by Nilufer Göle at EHESS and Nadjé Al-Ali at SOAS. Her thesis untitled "Women and Gender in Iraq: between Nation-building and Fragmentation" explores contemporary Iraqi women's activism through an in-depth ethnography of post-2003 Iraqi women's political groups conducted in Baghdad, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and a socio-historical study of women's social, economic and political experiences since the formation of the

Iraqi state. She edited *Féminismes Islamiques*, first collection on Muslim feminist scholarship published in France (La Fabrique editions, 2012), translated and published in German (Passagen Verlag, 2014). Webpages: <http://www.ifporient.org/zahra-ali> & <http://www.chester.ac.uk/departments/trs/staff/dr-zahra-ali>

Syrian women combating violent extremism

The ever-escalating violence in Syria and the mass targeting of civilians has a disproportionate impact on women that regularly goes unnoticed, yet women have been at the forefront of the struggle to protect civilians, enhance livelihood, address the needs of victims and survivors and revive peaceful activism while challenging patriarchal social structures. The development of the conflict from a popular uprising against a dictatorial regime into a full-fledged armed conflict with many national and international actors involved has shifted the attention from the main causes of the conflict into its consequences, raising fundamentalism and violent extremism being one of them, and while Syrian women grassroots groups have combated violent extremism long before it became the centre of the world's attention when it comes to Syria, this shift in attention has a severe negative impact on them, particularly through portraying them as passive victims rather than active agents. The purpose of this talk is to bring into the discussion the views and concerns of Syrian civil society and women groups who are trying to continue their peaceful struggle amongst an increasingly militarised conflict.

Laila Alodaat is a Syrian human rights lawyer specialised in international law of armed conflicts and the human rights of women. During her practice, she focused on international accountability and the responsibility to protect civilians and marginalized groups. She is also a trainer of international humanitarian law and has worked on several conflict situations including Syria, Libya, Iraq and Pakistan. She is currently the crisis response programme manager at the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and she volunteers as the Chairperson of Syria Justice and Accountability Centre and a board member of Badael, a Syrian organisation working to promote non-violence.

Beyond ISIS: Gender-based violence, militarism and authoritarianism

This talk will engage with the difficulty of researching and talking about gender-based violence in the Middle East to not fall into the trap of either being an apologetic of structural and systematic forms of discrimination and violence nor engaging in essentialist notions of Muslim/Middle East culture. While discussing the specific characteristic of violence linked to ISIS (daesh), I will present the historical and wider context that has normalised gender-based violence. My contribution will also discuss the Kurdish political movement linked to Turkey and Syria, which constitutes the main resistance to ISIS in the region militarily and ideologically. I will address the movement's ideological shift to stress gender-based equality as central to the project of radical democracy.

Nadje Al-Ali is Professor of Gender Studies at the Centre for Gender Studies, SOAS, University of London. She has published widely on women and gender in the Middle East as well as transnational migration and diaspora mobilization. Her publications include *What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (2009, University of California Press, co-authored with Nicola Pratt); *Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives* (Zed Books, 2009, co-edited with Nicola Pratt); *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (2007, Zed Books). Her most recent book (co-edited with Deborah al-Najjar) entitled *We are Iraqis: Aesthetics & Politics in a Time of War* (Syracuse University Press) won the 2014 Arab-American book prize for non-fiction. Currently, she is working on a research project about the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Professor Al-Ali is a member of the *Feminist Review* Collective.