



CMRB
The Centre for Research on
Migration, Refugees and Belonging

THE CENTRE FOR
GENDER STUDIES



SOAS
University of London

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

Rouba Mhaissen

Gender and Religious Extremism in Syria:

Women lead an ongoing fight to freedom

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 EHES and Nadjie 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>

Gender and Religious Extremism in Syria: Women lead an ongoing fight to freedom

In 2011, Syrians started a peaceful revolution against the Assad regime, that soon escalated into an armed conflict and a war spanning more than five years. Women played and continue playing an instrumental role in the protests, political and civil society work. Throughout the years, extremist groups such as Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS were implicated in the war, controlling areas inside Syria. Along with regime armed forces, those groups have committed human rights violation, and have used systemic violence as a weapon of war especially against women through rape, detentions, tortures, sexual slavery and forced marriage, as well as limits to their movement. This talk examines those themes, and how, despite all this, women still play a vital in Syria's ongoing fight to freedom and dignity.

Dr Rouba Mhaissen is an economist, activist, and development practitioner who works on development issues in the MENA region, particularly forced migration and the Syrian refugee crisis. She is the founder and director of Sawa Foundation (UK), and Sawa for Development and Aid (Lebanon), both Civil Society Organisations working with Syrian refugees on an integrated approach to development. She has researched and consulted on a range of issues pertaining to education, violence, conflict, gender, household economics, forced migration, and activism, among others. She holds a PhD in Gender and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and a Masters in International Development from the London School of Economics.

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.