

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Sahar (Soudeh) Mohtashamipour for the degree of Master of Arts in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies presented on June 12, 2014

Title: “Freedom from What?”: Iraqi Women’s Narratives from the 2003 U.S.-Led War

Abstract approved:

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This research explores the experiences of Iraqi women during and after the 2003 U.S.-led war (2003-2011). The aim of the project was to provide an occasion for a group of Iraqi women to give voice to their lived experiences of war and to document these voices, adding their subjective perspectives to the discourse surrounding the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Ten women who had lived in Iraq for at least two years during the 2003 U.S.-led war were recruited for this study. The rationale of this study is to explore the participants’ experiences of war through face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews. Using a grounded theory approach and qualitative analysis, the data were coded and emerging themes were identified. Four major themes that were discussed by participants were: (1) Gender-based Violence; (2) The Rescue Narrative; (3) Long Lasting Physical and Psychological Harm; and (4) Poverty and Female-headed Households. The stories that emerged from these interviews provide a counter narrative to the U.S.-centric story of the conflict.

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“Freedom from What?”: Iraqi Women’s Narratives from the
2003 U.S.-Led War

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Sahar (Soudeh) Mohtashamipour, Author

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First and foremost I would like to thank Allah for her beautiful blessings in my life and for constantly protecting me with peace of mind and heart.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my grandmother, Maman Shamsi. I will always regret not having been there by your side the last few years of your life, because of discriminatory visa rules against Iranian students. I miss your love, your smiles, your laughter and your kind heart.

Chapter One: Introduction

I was born during a war. Although my city was not at the frontline of the war, I can remember the tension all around the country. I recall that when the war siren went off, we had to turn off all the lights, run to the basement, and stay there while the fighter aircrafts and rockets could be heard roaring in the sky. It was a recurrent story during the first six years of my childhood. Whenever my son points to the sky to show me a rainbow, a kite, or an airplane, with all his excitement, I remember myself at his age, pointing to any object in the sky and asking my parents if it is going to shoot us or land in the middle of our house; that is what happened to many of my compatriots. Whenever my son points to the sky, I follow his finger with an unconscious smile; I know something beautiful is up there. And I recall myself pointing to the sky at that age; my mom's face would turn pale as she whispered, "God forbid."

My fearful years of childhood were spent during the Iraq-Iran war. Iraq was our "enemy" for eight years at a time when the US government was backing Iraq. Now here I am, in the United States, in the country that in 2003 invaded Iraq as its "enemy" and waged a war there for eight years. As a student of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, getting to know more about militarism and capitalist systems, and having developed close relationships with Iraqi friends, I have been prompted to think more deeply about how people's lives and emotions have been misused for political power struggles throughout the history. Putting these points together made me think

more about war, what causes it, and its consequences on the lives of people, especially women. In my opinion, there is hardly any rationale for waging war, the harshest and most destructive tool to achieve the political motives of radicals.

The September 11th disaster changed many lives. There were people who lost their lives or loved ones in that tragedy and there were more and more people who lost their lives in the wars afterwards, the so-called “Wars on Terror.” Nearly 3,000 people died in the September 11th attacks who were innocent civilians. The twin towers attacks became the main reason for the “War on Terror” and U.S. attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. Approximately 20,000¹ civilians have been killed in twelve years of ongoing war in Afghanistan and nearly 138,000² civilians have died in Iraq because of the U.S.-led war, which also opened the possibility of civil war in both countries. War has a far-reaching impact that goes beyond the battlefields. To discount human experiences and how they relate to the war narrative is problematic, and what is virtually absent from the hegemonic narrative is an examination of the central role played by women, who are most often forgotten during times of conflict because they are mainly viewed as victims rather than actors in war.

In challenging this lack of attention to women’s experiences, the purpose of this study is to examine the specific ways through which Iraqi women experienced

¹Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan, March 2014, retrieved from: <http://costsofwar.org/article/afghan-civilians>

² Iraq Body Count, Documented civilian deaths from violence, retrieved from: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>

war. I use this research as a tool to amplify Iraqi women's voices and to provide insight into the experiences of women during the 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq . This study is based on interviews with ten Iraqi women who lived in Iraq for several years during the war and have recently moved to the U.S.

Chapter two starts with a brief discussion of the contemporary history of Iraq. Central to the discussion in this chapter is a review of Saddam Hussein's rise to power in Iraq during the 1960s to lead the ruling Ba'ath party. Next, Saddam's wars—both with Iran and Kuwait—are examined. This leads the discussion to the core of this thesis: the U.S.-led war on Iraq in 2003. The chapter is concluded by a review of the limited literature available on the specific topic of this thesis: the effects of the 2003 war on Iraqi women.

In chapter three, the four theories, which ground my research, are discussed. Each section starts with a direct narrative related to the discussion of the section. First, the history of Orientalism and the “othering” of the people of the Orient versus Occident is explored by looking at Edward Said's theory. The second section looks at the history of Islamophobia and its rise after September 11, 2001, and how it has paved the road for initiating the “War on Terror.” By looking at how “giving freedom to women” was used as a justification for the “War on Terror,” the last section examines transnational feminism, focusing on the works of Chandra Mohanty, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Chapter four outlines the methodological framework and methods used in this study. The research design is detailed through a description of the process through which the ten participants were recruited, the methods of data collection, and the methods of data analysis. The chapter ends with my reflection as a researcher and an outsider/insider, and the challenges of conducting this study.

Chapter five consists of profiles of each Iraqi woman participant. It starts with some demographic information based on what they were willing and comfortable to share and the main points of their interviews, followed by one or two narratives by each participant.

In Chapter six, a discussion of the emerging themes and subthemes are linked to the findings within the literature in order to demarcate the original contribution of this study. Four major themes emerged as the main focus of most of the interviews, which are discussed in more detail in this chapter. The first theme is gender-based violence, which will be examined in two sub-sections: Kidnapping, and Street Harassment and Forced Hijab. The second theme explores the reaction of participants to Western rescue narratives that claim the war was intended to liberate Iraq and “to give birth to freedom.” The third theme investigates the long-lasting psychological and physical effects of war on Iraqi women. Living through the war, the lives of these women were scarred, and they were traumatized in a way that has never been fully assessed. The last theme discusses female-headed households and the challenges that these women face during and in the aftermath of war. In the patriarchal Iraqi society,

men are the breadwinners and traditional heads of the family. Many Iraqi women find themselves as the primary caregivers of the family when men are killed during war. The difficulties that these women face, economically and socially, will be examined in this chapter.

Chapter seven is the conclusion of this research. This chapter summarizes key findings and implications; I also emphasize the need for further research to bring to the forefront the voices of women upon whom many of the socio-economic and psychological burdens of war fall: Voices, that, I hope, this thesis has given a space to be heard.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter starts with an overview of Iraq. Then the history of the Ba'ath Party and the rise of Saddam Hussein to power are discussed. The chapter then turns to a brief description of Iraq's four wars over the past few decades: the Iran-Iraq war, the Anti-Kurdish conflict, the Iraq-Kuwait war, and the U.S.-led war on Iraq. After the overview, the current literature on the situation for women after the U.S.-led war of Iraq is examined.

Iraq – Country Overview

Iraq is a country located in southwestern Asia. It covers 168,754 square miles of land. Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey surround Iraq. The capital of Iraq is Baghdad and the official languages are Arabic and Kurdish. Based on CIA Factbook (2014) information, the population of Iraq is approximately 32,585,692 people, which consists of Arabs (75%-80%), Kurds (15%-20%), and Turcomans, Assyrians, or others (5%). The majority of the population (97%) are Muslims. Iraqi Muslims are mainly related to two major branches of Islam: Shia (60-65%) and Sunni (32-37%). The rest of Iraq's population includes Christian, Yazidi, Mandaean, and Jewish (CIA 2014).

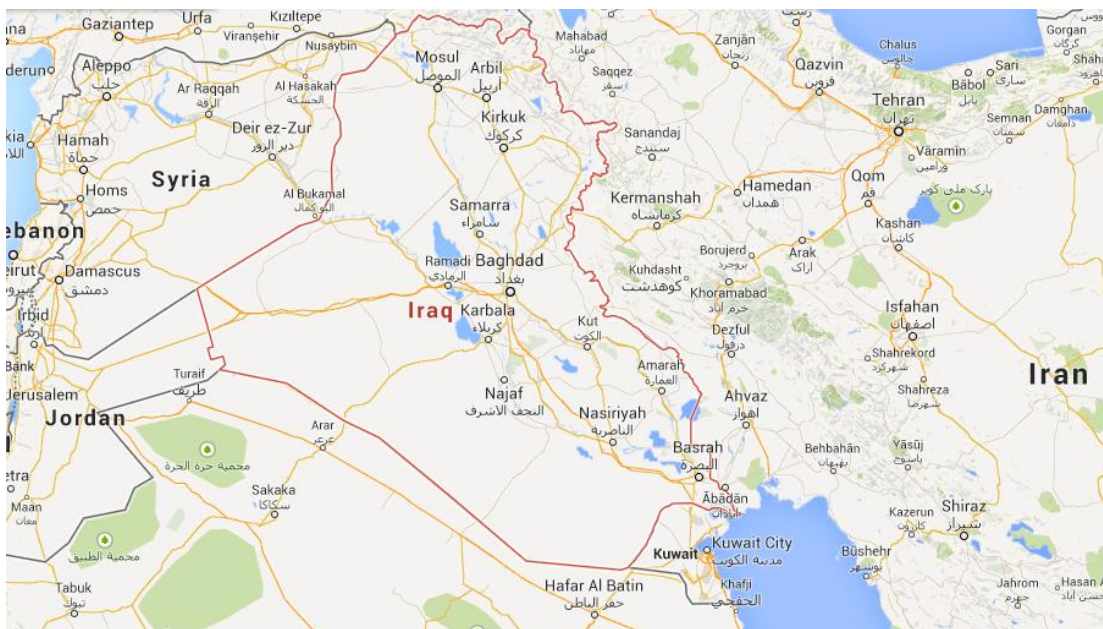


Figure 1 – Iraq Map
Source: Google Maps

Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party

The full name of the Ba'ath party is the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, which was founded in Iraq in 1951. Saddam Hussein joined the party in 1954 when he was a 20 year-old college student. In 1963, the Ba'ath party came to power in Iraq with a military coup, but was overthrown within months. In 1968, the party returned to power by another coup, in which Saddam Hussein played a major role as Assistant General Secretary of the party. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, who was one of the leading members of the Ba'ath party, was named as the fourth president of Iraq, and Saddam Hussein was named as his deputy. In 1979, al-Bakr stepped down from power due to his illness. Saddam Hussein, who had already gained a good reputation within the party, officially became the fifth president of Iraq. He remained in power as president of Iraq until 2003, when he was toppled from power by the U.S.-led coalition. In 2006, he was sentenced to death by hanging for his crimes against humanity.

Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) and the Role of the U.S.

On September 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran via land and air. At the time, Saddam Hussein was the president of Iraq and Ruhollah Khomeini was the leader of Iran. After two years of war, the US position changed from neutral toward favoring Iraq. According to Dobbs (2002): "Iranian troops had advanced to within a few miles of Basra, Iraq's second largest city. U.S. intelligence information suggested the Iranians might achieve a breakthrough on the Basra front, destabilizing Kuwait, the Gulf states, and even Saudi Arabia, thereby threatening U.S. oil supplies." That was

when the U.S. started to back Iraq in every possible way³. Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran. While U.S. officials stated that Iraq's government never announced that they were going to use them, retired Air Force Col. Rick Francona later stated: "The Iraqis never told us that they intended to use nerve gas. They didn't have to. We already knew" (Foreign Policy, Retrieved Jan 2014). Recently declassified CIA documents also show that the "U.S. had firm evidence of Iraqi chemical attacks beginning in 1983" (Harris and Aid, 2013), but rather than stopping Saddam Hussein, the U.S. supported him. The Iraq-Iran War ended on August 20, 1988, with the acceptance of UN Resolution 598. The cost of the war was estimated at around one million casualties and 1.2 trillion dollars in total (Hiro, 1989).

Anti-Kurdish Conflict (1986-1989)

In 1986, while Iraq was still at war with Iran, the Al-Anfal Campaign, a name given to the Anti-Kurdish conflict, started. The campaign was headed by Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam Hussein. It was an attempt to exterminate the Kurdish population of Iraq and has been labeled Kurdish genocide⁴. Towns and villages in the Kurdistan region of Iraq were attacked with chemical weapons. Based on a Human Rights Watch 1993 report, between 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds were killed during this campaign by the Ba'ath party.

³ "Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984". National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 82 <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/index.htm>

⁴ "British parliament unanimously recognizes Kurdish genocide". (2013, March 1). Kurdistan Regional Government. Retrieved from <http://www.krg.org/a/d.aspx?l=12&a=46796>

Iraq Invasion of Kuwait (1990-1991)

In August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Iraq and took over Kuwait City in two days. The main reason for the invasion was to take over Kuwait's oil and wealth (Crystal 2014). After the war with Iran, Iraq owed 35 billion dollars to Gulf creditors. Saddam Hussein asked Kuwait to wave Iraq's debt, claiming the war against Iran was in favor of the Arab World against Persians. Kuwait refused this demand, and in return Saddam invaded the country, took it over, and declared it Iraq's nineteenth province⁵. In February 1991, seven months of Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was ended by a U.S. military attack. Four days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the United Nations Security Council put financial and trade sanctions on Iraq. Sanctions remained on Iraq for thirteen years, until 2003, when Saddam Hussein was forced out of power. The effect of sanctions and its difficulties for Iraqi people will be discussed in greater depth in subsequent sections.

U.S.-led War on Iraq (2003-2011)

Iraqis had experienced four wars in just two decades. The last war began with the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The September 11 attacks became the main excuse for initiating the "War on Terror." The U.S.-led invasion started on March 20th, 2003. U.S. coalitions, with troops from the United Kingdom, Australia, Poland, and Spain, overthrew the Ba'ath Iraqi government after 21 days of combat operations. The main coalition mission, as stated by George W. Bush, was "to disarm Iraq of weapons of

⁵ "The Gulf War, 1991". (Last modified 2013, October 31). U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian. Retrieved from <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/gulf-war>

mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people."⁶ Following the invasion and after the overthrow of the Ba'ath party from power, Saddam Hussein hid for a while. He was eventually found and captured on December 13th, 2003, and executed as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The war continued until December 15th, 2011, when U.S. President Barak Obama announced an end to the war after almost 8 years and 9 months.

After an intensive search of Iraq, it was announced that no weapons of mass destruction were found and that Saddam Hussein had no intention of making them.⁷ As for the possible connections between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda, it was also revealed that, "Hussein's regime was not directly cooperating with Al-Qaeda before the U.S. invasion of Iraq," according to a declassified Defense Department report.⁸

There is no accurate number of Iraqi deaths in the conflict, since many of them were never reported. But the National Cluster Sample Survey estimates that more than half a million Iraqis were killed as a direct result of this war.⁹ The number of people who have been killed indirectly (because of health effects of war or population dislocation) has been estimated at twice the number of people who were killed directly.¹⁰

⁶ <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>

⁷ Report fuels Iraq WMD debate. (October 7, 2004). Cable News Network (CNN): <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/07/wmd.report.reax/index.html>

⁸ Hussein's Prewar Ties To Al-Qaeda Discounted. (April 6, 2007). Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/05/AR2007040502263.html>

⁹ Mortality in Iraq Associated with the 2003–2011 War and Occupation: Findings from a National Cluster Sample Survey by the University Collaborative Iraq Mortality Study: <http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001533>

¹⁰ Costs of War: <http://costsofwar.org/article/iraqi-civilians>

Iraq had yet to recover from earlier wars when the U.S.-led invasion was started. Years of war had not only corrupted Iraq's military and economic systems, but also left deep impacts on Iraqi society. All of the violence and trauma brought by years of war had fundamental effects on Iraq's society and the Iraqi people.

Statistics show that since the 2003 invasion there has been a rise in non-violent mortality rates in Iraq [figure 2], which shows how tension and war can affect peoples' lives in deep and lasting ways. This rise can be related to a variety of reasons from loss of health and sanitation, which come with the war, to stress and a lack of medicine. Since the invasion, Iraqis have faced shortages of medicine, food, shelter, clean water, electricity and other basic services, and all of these affect each Iraqi's life.

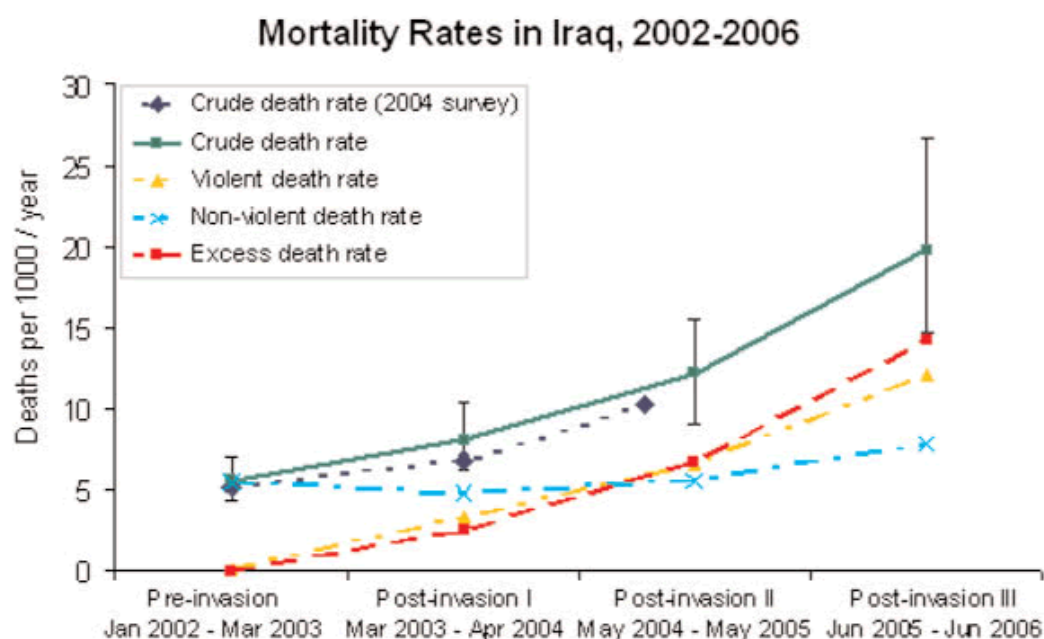


Figure 2: Mortality Rates in Iraq

Source: The Human Cost of the War in Iraq: Mortality study 2002-06 Survey Findings

In most of the articles I examined for this literature review, the impact of 13 years of sanctions prior to the war is highlighted. 13 years of sanctions followed by direful war left Iraqi women with acute unresolved problems after the war. As an example, sanctions led to an increase in health issues for Iraqis. A study done by G. R. Popal (2000) indicated that “increased malnutrition among children, increased infant and under-5 mortality rates and the increase in food-borne and waterborne diseases” were some of the health issues Iraqis faced as a result of sanctions. As noted by Al-Ali and Pratt, women “are suffering from inadequate healthcare, an ongoing economic crisis and a lack of basic services provided by the state” (p. 21), which leads to poor health conditions for Iraqis. As many Iraqi men were called to fight during the wars, it was women who became the heads of many families. Women became the main caregivers of their children. Mothers were the ones who were responsible for keeping their kids fed and safe, and in many cases this resulted in not paying attention to their own state of health and well-being. Moreover, in cases of urgent health issues it was hard to find proper health care because of the corrupted health care system under war (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2006).

Figure 3 shows that during the post-invasion time, from 2003 to 2006, there was a rise in violent deaths attributed to sources other than the U.S.-led coalition. It shows how the militarization of society leads to more violence, and the group that is most affected by this violence is often women. Violent deaths attributed to sources other than the coalition jumped from 1% of all deaths in Iraq before the invasion to 19% between June 2005 and June 2006. Moreover, violent deaths from unknown

sources increased sharply from 1% before the invasion to 27% in 2005, post-invasion. My thesis explores how this violence brought by war has affected Iraqi women's lives.

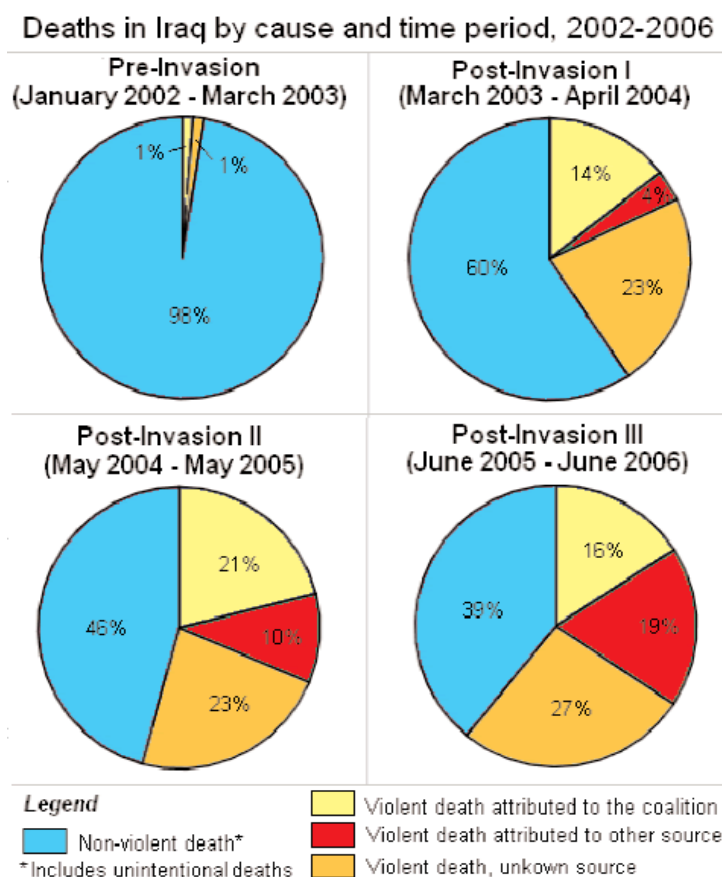


Figure 3 - Death in Iraq by cause and time period, 2002 – 2006

Source: Same

War and Violence against Iraqi Women: Ongoing Insecurity and Fear

General insecurity and chaos resulted in more violent acts in Iraq. Violence comes with war, and violence against women seems an especially inevitable part of

war. As Al-Ali (2005) describes, the situation in Iraq is an “extreme example” of the rise in violence against women after a war:

Violence against women is often endemic in post-war situations, partly because of the general state of anarchy and chaos but also as an element of heightened aggression and militarization, and prevailing constructions of masculinity promoted during conflict. An extreme example of this situation is contemporary Iraq, which, despite the official ending of military conflict, is extremely violent and insecure. (p. 724)

Lasky (2006) and Sandrasagra (2007) argue that during the Saddam Hussein regime Iraqi women faced violence too, but at least there were some strict laws to protect women. After Saddam Hussein and during the war, Iraq’s judicial system was destroyed, and that led to a lack of law and order. With the gap in security, each group of people wanted to enforce laws that supported their beliefs (e.g. Shias vs. Sunnis, Liberals vs. Conservatives, etc.) and this caused a lot of insecurity and chaos. Ali-Ali and Pratt (2006) see the lack of “properly functioning police forces” as a major reason for most of the insecurity and fear Iraqi women encountered in the public sphere. As chaos reigns in the public sphere, it increasingly becomes a space that women attempt to avoid at any cost. Consequently, their activities are confined to the private sphere and the shielded security of their own homes.

The increase of violence, which came with militarization, made some women decide to wear hijab in public as a way to “protect” their bodies (Al-Ali 2005, Lasky 2006, Abramowitz, 2009). Human Rights Watch published a report highlighting

increased sexual assaults against Iraqi women after the U.S.-led invasion (Enloe, 2010). Iraqi women decided to wear hijab to reduce the chance of street harassment or physical/sexual assault. Mary Hawkesworth explores the same phenomenon in Somalia during their 1990s war:

Responding to the danger of sexual assault in a world where protective family networks and state police services, as well as traditional mores, have been destroyed by warfare, women turned to the *jalaabiib* or *jalbaab*: long, heavy flowing dresses accompanied by a veil as form of self-protection. (qtd. in Lee and Shaw, p. 564)

Like Iraqi women, these Somali women were not veiled before the war, but they have since adopted it for their own security. Hawkesworth adds “[t]hat women may actively embrace more conservative modes of dress in regions plagued with war makes sense when considered in the context of the heightened sexualization of women associated with war and militarization” (p. 565).

More Iraqi women started wearing hijab, and this act of “protecting” themselves became another reason for other women, women who were not veiled, to face violence. Increased religious conservatism became a justification for more violence against Iraqi women. According to Lasky (2006) and Ali-Ali & Pratt (2006), war empowered Islamist parties in Iraq and they started interfering in different parts of society, including forcing unveiled women to wear hijab. This act of forcing became another source of gendered violence against Iraqi women. These women are now struggling for the basic right of choosing what to wear without being assaulted.

U.S. Military and Insecurity

Reports that emerged about sexual abuses by the U.S. military horrified Iraqi society. Lasky (2006) notes: “Numerous witnesses and victims have testified and investigators have confirmed that coalition forces and U.S. contractors have committed horrific crimes of sexual abuse, torture, and physical assault” (p. 7). Abuse of local populations by occupying military forces is a common byproduct of war. Due to moral and religious concerns, sexual assault and abuse had a deep impact on Iraqi women’s lives. Besides the physical and mental suffering that affected women endure, how their families and society look at them afterward in some cases creates further affliction and may result in horrible acts like honor killing (Lasky 2006), a point which I expand upon in the next section.

Honor Killing

Iraq witnessed a huge rise in honor killings during the war, due to different reasons. The U.S.-led invasion and Saddam Hussein’s fall destroyed Iraq’s judicial system, and there were family members who decided to take over its functions (Al-Ali, 2005; Enloe, 2010). Among the causes of honor killings were the arrests of women by U.S. military police. There were horrible stories of what was going on in the prisons and how the U.S. military used Iraqi women as “bargaining chips” to make men confess (Lasky, 2006). Such stories led Iraqi families to feel “dishonored” by their female family members after their arrests. It was possible that these women had been victims of sexual abuse or rape in the prisons and no one would know if they actually were or not. So whether she was raped or not, families felt dishonored

and some committed to killing that female member of the family (Lasky 2006). On the other hand, based on the patriarchal notion of blaming the victim, the threat of honor killing forced Iraqi women, especially in rural areas, to hide sexual abuses they had faced and not report them in order to protect their lives (Rosen, 2006).

Iraqi Women, Education and Jobs

War comes with increased violence, and women are among the most vulnerable groups to be affected with all different types of violence in society. During the Iraq war, as discussed earlier, people witnessed widespread insecurity in the public sphere. Iraqi women were very active in the public sphere for years, as noted by Al-Ali (2005) and Efrati (2012). Due to years of women's organized campaigning to access education and jobs, women had acceptable shares in workplaces (Elnoe, 2010). But the increase of insecurity after the invasion resulted in families not allowing their children, especially girls, to go to school. The same thing happened for women; they were forbidden to appear in public in order to prevent any possible assault. Although many women were educated and had their own jobs, the streets and public sphere didn't seem safe for them anymore and they preferred to stay at home and out of danger (Lasky, 2006; Al-Ali, 2005).

One of the issues that had a major effect on Iraqi women was massive unemployment in Iraq as a result of sanctions and economic crises during and after the wars (Neshat, 2003; Ali-Ali, 2005). Many men had been killed in the wars, which means there were more women heading families and serving as families' main breadwinners. Before the sanctions and economic crisis after the wars, Iraqi women

had their own jobs and good salaries. But due to rising unemployment they were the first group pushed back into their homes so that men could have their jobs, and it was Islamist people who filled most of those jobs (Enloe, 2010). Widows experienced challenging times taking care of their children under these economic difficulties.

Besides the violence in the public sphere, which prevented girls from going to school, there were economic disasters for Iraqi families, which came with wars and sanctions. Some Iraqi families could not afford to send all of their children to school, and it was usually girls who were kept at home when families faced economic deficiencies (Al-Ali, 2005). In the long run, this suspension of access to education will result in a less educated population and fewer equal job opportunities for Iraqi women compared to Iraqi men.

Iraqi Women's Activism

Iraqi women had their first journal, *Leila*, which dealt with women's rights, published in 1920, but the most progress toward the democratization of Iraqi women's condition started after the 1960s, according to Neshat (2003). They had years of success in claiming their rights, and years of being pushed back (Efrati, 2012). Years of different wars and sanctions advanced more patriarchal traditions; as Neshat (2003) implies: "Women were the real victims of war and sanctions. The worse economic situation affected on their health and educational needs" (p. 57). Al-Ali and Pratt (2006) also noted "there are many signs that Iraqi women might prove to be biggest losers in post-Saddam Iraq. Iraqi women are struggling more than ever in their day-to-day lives, trying to keep their households going, feed their families and

keep everyone alive” (p. 21). Although struggling with lots of basic concerns, they were not passively witnessing what was happening to them. After the war many Iraqi women came together to rebuild their country and try to get their voices to be heard (Lasky, 2006; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2006).

Al-Ali and Pratt (2006) start their article “Women in Iraq, Beyond the Rhetoric” with these sentences:

In the Iraq of the Bush administration’s imagination, women were to help “give birth to freedom” in the neo-liberal post-Saddam order. But three years after the US-led invasion, and despite vigorous women’s activism, Iraqi women have been disempowered- reduced to instruments of political agendas and symbols of communal differences. (p. 18)

Although Iraqi women didn’t have good conditions even under the Ba’ath party years in power, war simply shifted their issues and problems and didn’t benefit them. Many people suffered from the war, but Iraqi women suffered from the war most, since beside the basic needs of clean water, electricity, etc., they lost their loved ones, their jobs, and their right to study.

Neshat (2003) suggests that the best way for Iraqi women to achieve their demands is to organize their own groups and movements. There is no one better than themselves to speak to their own needs and their challenges. Empowering and supporting Iraqi women’s grassroots organization is one of the most important ways

for feminists around the world to help Iraqi women reach the point of social status they demand.

Iraqi Women in Diaspora

According to Al-Ali and Pratt's (2006) article, there were many Iraqi women who lived in the U.S. who, by watching what was going on in their hometowns, decided to become active in the process of rebuilding Iraq. Most of them were closely working with the U.S. government and received funds from the government. So such organization has been viewed with skepticism by Iraqi women residing in Iraq. Such organizations are viewed as puppets of the U.S. government and as ones that assist in enacting its foreign agenda. Such foreign agendas are almost always linked to cultural imperialism—the attempt to impose U.S. culture on Iraqis and, in particular, Iraqi women. The end result was a backlash against women's rights efforts that were initiated by Iraqi women from the U.S. (Al-Ali, 2005). As Al-Ali and Pratt (2006) believed, the U.S. supported women and empowered them only in upper levels of “official rhetoric,” not at the grassroots level. On the other hand, they observe, “the louder political leaders in the West shout “women's rights” while Iraq is occupied, the bigger the backlash against women's rights might be in the long run” (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2006, p. 22).

Iraqi refugees.

The war in Iraq resulted in the large-scale displacement of Iraqis. People decided to leave their country because of the numerous problems they were facing, hoping for a better future for their families. But the life that was waiting for them was not as bright as they had assumed. There is high unemployment among Iraqi refugees; many of them were specialists in Iraq, but they could not find a proper job in the country of resettlement. “A number of refugees expressed disappointment that the information they received prior to departure for the United States regarding the job-placement services and support they would be given was different from the reality they encountered upon arrival” (Abramowitz, 2009, p. 8). They have to accept any job, regardless of their background and areas of specialty, in order to survive.

The number of Iraqi refugees was around 300,000 in February 2009, and there are many more unregistered refugees; estimates show there are likely around 1 million refugees in total. After all of the disasters Iraqi refugees faced as a consequence of war, the United States is trying to take steps to help Iraqi refugees, as the U.S. President has pledged:

America has a strategic interest – and a moral responsibility – to act. In the coming months, my administration will provide more assistance and take steps to increase international support for countries already hosting refugees; we’ll cooperate with others to resettle Iraqis facing

great personal risk. (Barack Obama, February 27, 2009, as cited in Abramowitz, 2009, p. ii)

According to the Center for Torture and Trauma survivors in Atlanta, “Iraqis faced the worst of the four refugee populations that had significant numbers represented among the Center’s clients” (Abramowitz, 2009, p. 33). Iraqi refugees arriving to the U.S. had “poor general health and war-related physical trauma” (Abramowitz, 2009, p.9). As has been mentioned in the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees’ report, Iraqi women refugees face increasing violence including domestic violence (Abramowitz, 2009).

Different Areas in Iraq, Different Issues

Although I discuss Iraq in general in this chapter, Iraq is a diverse country with different issues for different groups of people. For example, the north of Iraq, Kurdistan, was a safe place before, during and after the war. In 1991, following the First Gulf War, Kurdistan gained its de facto autonomy and became self-ruled. So Iraqi Kurds didn’t suffer as much from the war and they were far from the main conflicts. Iraqi women in Kurdistan are progressing in many ways, especially after the fall of Saddam Hussein. As Lasky (2006) notes about the women’s movement in Kurdistan: “More women’s centers have opened, [and] Kurdish women have held positions in the interim Iraqi governments” (p. 6). Aside from regional differences, religion, class, and race are other factors, which warrant further study.

Chapter Three: Theories

In the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the need to “rescue” women and restrain Islam was used as rationales to pave the path for war. Bush described the “War on Terror” as a “crusade,” as if the enemy of the West was Islam and the war was a religious one (Y. Ali 1044). By naming the conflict a “crusade,” Bush recalled the struggles of several centuries ago, wherein crusaders invaded the Muslim world to reclaim the holy sites of Christianity. In so doing, Bush not only juxtaposed Islam and Christianity—invoking the historical symbolism of the crusades and the violent images related to it—but also recapitulated contemporary theories that insist on the inevitability of a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1992). This theory has been criticized by major theorists like Edward Said (2001) at the very time when Bush was reintroducing it into the popular consciousness. As a further justification for war, the emancipation and liberation of women was used over and over again (Abu-Lughod 783). As Laura Bush stated: “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes... The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (qtd. in Barazangi 2008). Did the war help Iraqi women “to give birth to freedom,” as claimed by the Bush administration before the invasion? Did the war really emancipate women in any form? Barazangi argues that, as a result of these invasions, “women have not only lost their agency, they have also been robbed of the capacity to determine their own destiny” and “gender justice was never achieved” (416).

In this section I provide the theoretical background for my research on Iraqi

women's experiences of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. I start with Orientalism, Edward Said's groundbreaking postcolonial analysis of Western attitudes toward the Orient. Next, I take a look at Islamophobia as one of the branches of Orientalism and demonstrate how it provided needed context for the invasions after 9/11. I explore the role of the media and U.S. politicians in inflaming Islamophobia. Then I consider the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Lila Abu-Lughod, two scholars who provide useful framing for my discussion through their Transnational Feminist points of view. In the last section of this chapter I delve into Standpoint Theory and the importance of hearing directly from Iraqi women to get to know the actual effects of war on them. Is it possible that the harshest acts of war and killing people can bring peace in any form?

Orientalism

"We were in a cultural orientation for International students. They asked us to pair up with some other new international student and share about our culture. I asked the other student whether he had ever seen anybody from Iraq before, and he said no. I said: I would love to know what do you think about us? He paused... then he said: Dangerous!" (Ishtar)

The state of "Othering" Orient versus Occident was critically discussed by Edward Said. His influential book *Orientalism* examines the way that the West created the image of East during the colonial era. Said defined Orientalism as a

“Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”

(p. 3). Said linked Orientalism, power, and colonialism, and pointed to the ways the West has framed Arabs/Muslims. Said also noted that the Arab World has been ruled by outside powers, non-Arab powers, since the 16th century: by Ottomans until World War I, then by British and French colonial power, and—since World War II and the discovery of oil—by the U.S and Israel. Said pointed to the occupation of Iraq as a new form of imperialism. In the preface to the 2003 edition of *Orientalism*, Said stated that: “As I write these lines, the illegal and unsanctioned imperial invasion and occupation of Iraq by Britain and the United States proceeds, with a prospect of physical ravagement, political unrest and more invasions that is truly awful to contemplate” (p. xiv).

Said believed that following the American war against Iraq, the words “America” and “American” had been used more times than ever before to stoke patriotic feelings. He also highlighted the media’s repeated use of the words “Us” and “Our” to speak on behalf of all Americans. Said referred to frequent media and U.S. official statements, in the aftermath of 9/11, about those “other” people who were not like “us” and didn’t appreciate “our values,” as fundamentally Orientalist statements. He found such “us” and “our” statements problematic because what American officials sought did not necessarily reflect what many Americans wanted.

Islamophobia

“My sister sent me a link to a video. It was a hidden camera on one of the U.S. university campuses. There were two actors, one boy and one

girl in pants and long sleeve shirt and she was wearing veil. The boy was verbally attacking the Muslim girl and yelling that she is terrorist because she is Muslim and she should go back “home.” The hidden camera was recording the passers-by reactions. Girl is constantly saying that she’s not a terrorist and she is also an American. Among tens of people who passed by only one person stood up for her, spoke out and asked him to stop treating the girl in that way... I couldn’t stop sobbing... I, myself, could be that girl... whenever I see people trying not to make eye contact with me, or look at me from the corner of their eyes, scenes from that video come to my mind.... No! I am not a terrorist!” (Sahar)

Following 9/11, the U.S. witnessed a huge increase in discrimination against Muslims. Islamophobia increased since that day and has affected millions of Muslims’ everyday lives. Although the term “Islamophobia” has been used since 1991, it did not become common in the popular vocabulary until a decade later (Sheridan, 2006). Islamophobia has been defined as “dread or hatred of Islam-- and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p.1). Although most Americans had internalized “latent Orientalism” before 9/11, Muslims could freely practice their religion (Ali, 2012). However, after that incident many things changed for Muslims. Their overall sense of belonging within U.S. communities was challenged, and personal safety became an issue of particular concern. In the year 2000, there were 36 reported hate crimes against Muslims in the

U.S. In 2001, the figure jumped to 546 crimes (FBI report, cited in Kaplan, 2006).

Looking at the statistics of hate crimes in the U.S., it should also be considered that the margin of error includes immigrant Muslims (who represent a significant number of Muslims in the U.S.) who often do not report hate crimes. Many immigrant Muslims come from countries where the “governments are less than solicitous of their citizens’ legal rights, and crimes are thus left to be avenged by family, clan, or tribal relations of the victim” (Kaplan, 2006, p. 14). Besides, due to the public backlash, Muslims’ mistrust of U.S. agencies of authority made it hard for them to report hate crimes without having the fear of being accused themselves. So the real numbers of crimes against Muslims is likely much higher than official reports suggest.

Role of media.

The origin of the prejudice against Muslims in the media is not clear, although it has been traced back many years. Jack Shaheen (2003) reviewed over 900 Hollywood movies with Arab/Muslim characters from 1896 to 2000. He found a century of offensive stereotypes toward Arabs and argued that they were portrayed as the number one public enemy over the years. The images of dark-skinned and duplicitous “oil sheiks” had appeared in countless cartoons and films in the 1970s and 1980s (Love, 2012). Two-thirds of Arab American youth surveyed before 9/11 listed Arabs as a group most often portrayed negatively and as America’s enemy in the media (Wray-Lake, 2008). The media was effectively used to convince American

people that Muslims and Arabs were anti-democratic, different from, and incompatible with American culture long before 9/11. Television programs, comic books, video games, and Hollywood movies repeated the same themes over the years (Elver, 2012; Zeal, 2012).

Mainstream news coverage reinforced Hollywood stereotypes against Muslims and always portrayed them only in masses and usually in relation to violence and/or extremism (Martin-Munoz, 2010). The stereotypes promoted by the media included Muslim women as “uneducated” or “oppressed” and Muslim men as “terrorist” or “violent men” (Salari, 2002). Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007), in their book, *Fueling Our Fears*, discuss the public’s view towards Muslims in the six months following 9/11 as less harsh than it became a year later and thereafter. They explain:

Shortly after 9/11, President George W. Bush, New York’s Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and other leaders went public to urge Americans not to blame all Muslims and not blame Islam for what some terrorists did in the name of their religion. But rather quickly, these voices went for the most part silent. Given today’s information glut, the mass media, especially television, tend to pay more attention to the loudest and most outrageous statements rather than to the calm voices of reason--- except when the latter belong to prominent leaders. Thus, after 9/11, those who vilified the religious practices of Muslims and their religion far too often received media attention without being taken to task for their bigotry. (p. 94)

Western Media represented the image of Muslims as enemies over the years, and these stereotypes led to racist attacks, from property damage and verbal abuse to physical assault and worse, directed at Muslim communities, especially immigrants (Poynting and Mason, 2007).

Role of politicians.

President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton were trying to foster American acceptance of Islam, according to Mazrui (2004). He noted that Clinton offered a friendly gesture to Muslims by sending them greetings during the month of fasting (Ramadan) and hosting celebrations of Eid el Fitr during his tenure. Mazrui adds that during Clinton's presidency, Muslim women's hijab was accepted and they could easily practice their faith.

During George W. Bush's presidency, when the attacks on the World Trade Center happened, the president's reaction to the 9/11 attacks—in response to the public's concern “Why do they hate us?”—was “Because they hate our freedom.” He put “they,” i.e. Muslims, against “us,” i.e. Americans. The fact that many of “them” might live among “us” seemed threatening for the public. It ignited a wave of hate crimes. Moreover, the attacks on the twin towers became a primary excuse to start the war in Afghanistan. Bush described the War on Terror as a “crusade” in a press conference just a week after 9/11. He asked the American people to understand the

new kind of *evil* and to be patient as the war on terrorism was going to take a while (Ali, 2012).

Only one day after his press conference and describing the War of Terror as crusade, President Bush gave a surprising speech at the Islamic Center of Washington and gratified Islamic leaders: “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam ... Islam is peace ... women who cover their heads in this country must feel comfortable going outside their homes ... That’s not the America I know. That should not and that will not stand in America” (Cited in Kaplan 2006). Mazrui (2004) argues that President Bush tried to assure Muslims that the war against terrorism was not a war against Islam, but his administration officials failed to show any action to support this view. None of the sources I reviewed for this research has compared the media coverage of these two speeches by Bush, one against Islam and one supporting it, and how the public received them.

In 2002, President Bush made another important visit to the Islamic Center of Washington on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. The president’s visit to the Center brought the discrimination against Muslims issue to the forefront, and the hate crime level had significantly declined between his two visits (Kaplan, 2006). Kaplan (2006) believes that President Bush used his presidency as a bully pulpit to unite Americans and that this strongly helped to reduce the hate crimes in the year following 9/11. Although Kaplan relates this decline in hate crimes to the effective steps taken by Bush, it seems logical that the months immediately following the attacks would have shown more public anger compared to a year after the event.

With all the media attention and politicians' statements, a poll shortly after 9/11 shows that less than half of the respondents believed that American Muslims were loyal to the United States. Government began systematically treating American Muslims as presumably disloyal citizens who were not entitled to the rights of citizenship (Ali, 2012). A Gallup poll in 2006 found that 34% of respondents stated that they believe Muslims in America are sympathetic to groups like Al-Qaeda (Cited in Amarasingam 2010).

The history of Islamophobia in America can be divided into three periods: before 9/11, after 9/11 until the 2008 presidential election, and after the 2008 presidential election (Ali, 2012). During the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama's opponents converted the term "Muslim" into a slur, and they accused him of being a "closet Muslim" (Ali, 2012). Obama's reaction to this "accusation" marked the third period of Islamophobia. He did his best to distance himself from the Muslim Community and constantly reassured the public that he is a devout Christian. He never stopped in a mosque nor met with any Muslim organization (compared to numerous stops at churches and synagogues) during the campaign, and he never stated publicly that there was nothing wrong with being a Muslim. During one of Obama's campaign rallies, two Muslim women who had hijab were asked to leave the stage area in order to avoid any negative impact on the election (Ali 2012; Amarasingam 2010; Elver, 2012; Love 2012). These incidents all affected public assumptions about Islam and Muslims.

Transnational Feminism

“Does your husband ask you to veil? No! He prefers I remove it!

Surprise!

Can women vote in your country? Yes, since 1963. Surprise!

Are you allowed to drive in your country? Yes and we also have great

female racecar drivers in my county. Surprise!

She: What is your favorite sport? Me as a veiled Muslim woman:

Swimming?

She: How come? Do you know how to swim? Me: Yes, I’ve been

swimming since when I was 5. Surprise!” (Sahar)

Transnational Feminism highlights the notion of race and nationality. Transnational feminists critique the Eurocentric, imperialistic and colonialist views within feminist ideology and seek to unpack white privilege and give voice to all women. They point to the privilege of knowledge production: who produces knowledge and who has access to it. Transnational feminism is based on promoting the solidarity of women while acknowledging their differences.

In the next two sections I explore the works of Chandra Mohanty and Lila Abu-Lughod as two transnational feminists who challenge the categorizing and essentializing of women by their race, religion, nationality and other categories of difference.

Who are “Third World” women?

“... images such as the veiled women, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, and so on... exist in universal, ahistorical splendor, setting in motion a colonialist discourse that exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing First/Third World connections.” (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 41)

In *Under Western Eyes*, Mohanty critiques how “Western” feminists put all “Third World” women in a singular monolithic context. Mohanty argues that for some “Western” feminists all women in the Third World collectively had been seen as “poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.” (p. 65). Feminists in the West ignored the complexities of different women in Third World and misused their privilege in the system of producing knowledge and their use of the singular “Third World Woman,” which Mohanty calls a “process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world” (63). According to Mohanty, this is “how ethnocentric universalism is produced in certain analyses” (64). Mohanty critiqued “Western” feminists views toward “Third World” women. However it is also essential to consider that this singular monolithic perspective about “Western” feminists should be avoided too.

Feminism and War, edited by Riley, Mohanty and Pratt (2008), explores different aspects of war through feminist lenses. In its introduction, they state:

While the US imperial project calls for “civilizing” men of color and oppressed nationalities - black, brown, Arab, Central and south Asian - and for “rescuing” women of color outside U.S. borders, the same state engages in targeting, criminalizing, imprisoning, and killing these very peoples within its own borders in the context of the “endless wars” required to sustain capitalist expansion. (P.4)

The fact that war brings violence against women and those women are the ones who disproportionately suffer from war is one that does not get coverage by the U.S. media, who claim that war is essential for bringing freedom to women in the region.

“Do Muslim Women Need Saving?”

In 2002, Lila Abu-Lughod published an article that received a great deal of attention. In “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?: Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” she critiques the notion of “saving Muslim women” and points out that Muslim women, like any other women around the world, should be seen in their historical, cultural, and ideological context. In 2013, Abu-Lughod expanded this argument in her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* She discusses how “the image of oppressed Muslim women became connected to a mission to rescue them from their cultures” (Abu-Lughod 2012). Abu-Lughod points to the particular issues of patriarchal interpretations of Islam that have been highlighted by “Western” feminists, media, and politicians. She states, “[w]e should want justice and rights for women, but can we accept that there might be different

ideas about justice and that different women might want, or even choose, different futures from ones that we envision as best?" (p.43). Abu-Lughod reminds readers that "secularism has not brought about women's freedom or equality in the West" (p.19), and religion should not be blamed for the situation of women.

Abu-Lughod points to the fact that literature and memoirs about Muslim women's suppression in Islamic countries always get a great deal of attention in the West. Western media and even Western feminists highlight these stories of oppression, and the framing of these memoirs always "marks the abuses as cultural or collective" (p. 89). Abu-Lughod also explains that in many cultures there might be incidents of rape, beating, incest, etc., and these stories might be shocking for some people in their own culture, too. Therefore, there should not be a collective interpretation of individual personal stories. Abu-Lughod concludes:

In our world of mass media, these iconic abused-but-defiant Muslim women are feted in elite New York circles, featured in Glossy magazines and funded lavishly through personal charity. They warm the hearts of those who promoted them, sell their stories, and, as Sherene Razack puts it, "steal their pain" for profit and personal comfort. As I have argued, these stories are key ingredients in the normalization of political and military hostility toward countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq (p. 107).

An example of these memoirs, which I investigated for this research is,

Mayada, Daughter of Iraq: One Woman's Survival Under Saddam Hussein, written by Jean Sasson. To get a better sense of the influence of these kinds of books on people, I checked this book's reviews on Goodreads, one of the world's largest websites for readers and book reviews. One person writes, "If Bush had made this book mandatory reading for all Americans, he would probably have received more support for the war." Another raves: "Well written. Unbelievable... First time I thought maybe something good came from the war with Iraq." And a third says: "It was eye opening to read about Iraq in Saddam's day. What a horrible place! I have never been a huge supporter of the war in Iraq but after reading this book I have a renewed appreciation for those who brought down Saddam and his terrorist regime" (From Goodreads.com). These sorts of reviews show the power of this type of literature to deeply influence readers.

"Western" media and feminists have often focused on the burqa and veil. Many different groups of people dress in a certain way, but how Muslim women dress may label them as people who cannot speak for themselves and who need agents to speak on their behalf (Abu-Lughod 2013). This is not the case for Muslim women who do not veil. They have been seen as liberated women who rescued themselves from their culture or religion. These are examples of looking collectively at certain groups of people and not considering their motivations for choosing to dress in a specific way.

Abu-Lughod points to the fact that, after the Taliban was removed from power

in Afghanistan, many liberals were surprised that women there were still wearing the Burqa. The Taliban did not invent the Burqa; it was part of many women's culture and beliefs. But the Burqa became the most significant symbol of women's oppression under the Taliban regime. The burqa was also helping women to be protected from male harassment and facilitated their mobility in the public sphere. Abu-Lughod poses the question: "[W]hy should we be surprised that Afghan women did not throw off their burqas when we know perfectly well that in our society it would not be appropriate to wear shorts to the Metropolitan Opera?" (p. 36). She wants to point out that social and cultural contexts should be considered when talking about what is appropriate in a specific society. I explored the societal context of Iraq in my interviews with participants, and this is covered in more depth in the Findings chapter.

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" and White Male Savior

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a postcolonial literary theorist and philosopher. She is a prolific writer, but probably her best-known essay is "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this article she discusses *Sati* and what drives women to perform it. *Sati* is an ancient Hindu practice in which the wife is burned alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. British colonial power during the nineteenth century banned the practice and decreed that *Sati* could be practiced only if the woman agreed to it. Spivak refers to this intervention on the part of the colonial power as "white men rescuing brown women from brown men." Spivak argues that even after the ban, many women

practiced *Sati* as they were “willing” to. In her essay, Spivak problematizes the notion of the voices of these women whom she calls “the subaltern.” Borrowing from the British military ranking, Spivak recalls the term subaltern, originally a low ranking officer, to discuss these women whose voices cannot be heard. The voices of the subaltern female in *Sati* practice cannot be ascertained, she argues. Were these women willing to die? Or has societal pressure influenced their will? For Spivak, no one has heard what the subaltern says because neither the colonial power nor the patriarchal society has allowed the subaltern female to speak for herself. . As Morton (2003) notes: "Spivak frequently engages with the singular histories and live of "Third World", subaltern women in order to disrupt the codes and convention of western knowledge and the maintenance of imperial power." (p.7). As DasGupta argues, the notion of “white men rescuing brown women from brown men” was used by imperialist systems that justified the war against Afghanistan and Iraq, the war of “white men” over “brown men.”¹¹

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theorists believe that knowledge is socially constructed and argue that the dominant culture frames how others are represented in society (Mann, 2012). The knowledge that leads people to have prejudice against a certain group of people needs reconstruction, and acknowledging others’ points of view can lead toward

¹¹ “Your Women Are Oppressed, But Ours Are Awesome”: How Nicholas Kristof And *Half The Sky* use Women Against Each Other”: <http://www.racialicious.com/2012/10/08/your-women-are-oppressed-but-ours-are-awesome-how-nicholas-kristof-and-half-the-sky-use-women-against-each-other/>

mutual understanding.

Droosigma (2007) explains the importance for marginalized women to take part in the process of knowledge production: “Standpoint theory asserts that women’s marginal positions provide them with less distorted, less partial views of the world which present a better place from which to begin knowledge production” (p. 298). Standpoint theory asserts that women experience different kinds of subordination based on their race, class, and sexuality (Mann 2012), and therefore it is essential to view these differences through the lenses of particular marginalized groups.

Standpoint theory argues that the dominant group produces the knowledge, sets boundaries for people, and guides them on how to understand the world (Mann 2012). By the same token, in *Under Western Eyes*, Chandra Mohanty (1998) explores how “Western Women” produce knowledge about “Third World Women.” She argues that in the system of making knowledge, “Western Women” have a chance to present themselves as educated and modern women who have complete control over their own bodies and freedom to make their own choices. On the other hand, “the West” portrayed “Third World Women” as a group of uneducated, oppressed, and poor women. Regardless of “Third World Women’s” different positions in society, they have been objectified in western feminist texts (Mohanty 1998). As a consequence, not just for “Third World Women,” but also all other marginalized groups, it is important to take control of this process of knowledge production, to prevent the powerful discourses from “defining” them.

An example of defining oneself is Patricia Hill Collins (1999), an African-

American, working-class woman, who is now a professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland. She tried to regain her voice by claiming her unique experiences rather than accept being marginalized. She states, “over the years I have tried to replace the external definitions of my life forwarded by dominant groups with my own self-defined viewpoints” (Collins, 1999, p.vi). She adds that although she cannot speak for such “a large and complex group as African-American women,” her unique experiences are shared with many other people in her category. She hopes all other marginalized groups will find their voices and speak for themselves. She critiques limitations of oppressed people to express their ideas in the language that can be understood by those in power: “[o]ppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group” (p. vii). Alternatively, she encourages them to put marginalized groups’ ideas in the center and encourages the dominant group to “investigate the similarities and differences among their own standpoints and African-American women,” or any other marginalized group. Marginalized groups not only have their own points of view on different issues, but they must also possess the dominant group’s knowledge. In contrast, the dominant group lacks understanding of the marginalized groups’ points of view. When it is said that the U.S. is going to bring Human Rights to Iraq or wants to bring freedom for Afghan or Iraqi women, first it should be considered what those women think of as desired freedom or rights for themselves. Second, what is the role of those women in the process of claiming their rights? These questions, which I asked participants,

became a critical focus of this research and are further explored in the Findings section.

Chapter Four: Methodology And Research Design

In this chapter I explore the methodological framework for the current research project. I explain the research design, and how the data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the limitations and challenges of my approach while gathering data are examined.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is based on theories that are “grounded in the data themselves” (Charmaz 2006, p.2). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) define it, grounded theory is “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). Instead of having a hypothesis, research starts with collecting “rich data” and coding them. In the process of coding the data, as Charmaz (2006) describes, “unexpected ideas emerge and keep emerging” (p.59), which leads to the emergence of conceptual categories. The important aspects of grounded theory are these core categories, which are grounded in the data (Glaser, 1978). The theory subsequently emerges from careful analysis of the data and the patterns that form the categories.

The most common method of data collection in grounded theory is in-depth interviews, which rely on open-ended questions that can be modified to reflect emerging theory (Charmaz 2006). Grounded theory starts with a broad question and narrows down based on participants’ areas of interest and concern.

Using a grounded theory approach, this research investigated the experiences of Iraqi women during the 2003 U.S.-led war on Iraq. Through Iraqi women's narratives of war, I sought to explore how the war has affected Iraqi women's lives.

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions. Iraqi women were asked to share what they went through during the war and their overall experiences and thoughts about the invasion and its consequences for Iraqi women.

Inclusion Criteria

The selection criteria for the study required participants to be: Iraqi women, 18 years or older and able to speak English, who lived in Iraq during the 2003 US-led war on Iraq for at least two years. Since I do not speak Arabic, no non-English speaking participants were recruited for this study.

Research Design

Recruitment and sampling.

Participants were identified through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that involves asking participants to provide a referral for another potential participant that might be interested in the research (Goodman 1961).

The effectiveness of this method has been recognized as significant in a variety of cases, mainly regarding marginalized populations (Cohen & Arieli 2011).

I started with a good friend of mine who is Iraqi, and she put me in contact with some other Iraqi women in the community. Each participant was encouraged to pass on information about the study and the recruitment material to other women they knew in the Iraqi community who might be interested and eligible. Potential participants were given information about the study and were asked if they felt comfortable enough to talk about their experiences of war and its impact on their personal life. Once the participant contacted me, I confirmed that she met the selection criteria before explaining the nature of the study in depth. I explained the consent form [Appendix B] and the fact that the interview would be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Once the candidate agreed to participate in the study, we set up a date, time, and location that was most convenient for the participant.

Semi-structured interviews.

Ten informal, semi-structured interviews with Iraqi women were conducted from February 2014 to April 2014. Interviews lasted from one to two hours, based on how much participants were willing to share. For all of the interviews except two, participants asked me to go to their homes because it was more convenient for them.

The semi-structured interview was organized into 5 key sections with several subsidiary questions [Appendix A] that were informed by my review of the literature and prior conversations with Iraqi women friends. The key questions were:

1. A general question about their thoughts and feelings about the US-led war and its effects on Iraqi women's lives.
2. Gender aspects of war; how things were different for women vs. men.
3. War and its effects on participants' personal lives.
4. War and its effects on women's social statuses in Iraq.
5. How things would be different if the U.S. had never invaded Iraq.

Before the start of the interviews, I once again read the consent form to the participants in person and asked permission to audio record the conversations. In maintaining agreements of confidentiality and anonymity, participants were asked to pick a pseudonym for themselves. After each of these steps, the interviews were conducted according to the interview guide.

In an effort to reduce the discomfort and emotional harm from remembering painful memories during the interviews, I paid close attention to participants' feelings while they were talking about sensitive issues and encouraged them to take breaks whenever they needed. Participants were told at the beginning of the interviews that they could skip any of the questions if they felt uneasy and return to them later or avoid the question entirely. Whenever I apologized for making them sad by remembering their painful memories, they replied that it was "normal" for them because it was "their everyday life" and they always remember those days: "It is not remembering, it is like describing images that I have in my head all the time," one of

them said. While we recorded the interviews, I also took some observational notes and wrote down the demographic information that they were sharing.

All of the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. After conducting each interview, I transcribed it by listening to the audio recording and manually typing a verbatim script, using the oTranscribe web-based application.

Analyses of Interview Data: Thematic Analysis

Dedoose software, a web-based application was used to code qualitative data. After reviewing each of the transcripts a few times, I started immersing myself in the data by reading them over and over and began “open-coding,” as defined by Glaser (1978): “coding the data in every way possible” (p. 56). From there I began to identify initial topics by making notes. The more transcripts I read through, I began to see similar topics across interviews. After coding all of the data, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is an inductive approach that identifies themes emerging from the data. Through thorough readings of the data, thematic analysis is a form of “pattern recognition” where themes become categories for analysis. I looked for the latent or interpretative themes that emerge, or the cultural assumptions that underlie what is in the data. Once relevant concepts and themes were identified, their relationships were analyzed.

Reflections and Limitations

It is important to acknowledge my challenges and limitations in my approach to data collection. Although the snowball sampling method enabled my participants to come to the interview with a good idea about the nature of my questions and the purpose of my research, language barriers remained a concern throughout some of the interviews. Due to language barriers, it took a long time to go over the details to make sure that everything was expressed and understood correctly. Some of the participants were concerned that they were not sufficiently articulate in English. There were moments when they could not express a word or concept in English and I would ask them to repeat it in Arabic; this way I attempted to minimize potential misunderstandings by encouraging the participants to explain a concept in Arabic, which I then translated. Considering my limited knowledge of Arabic, in cases that I didn't understand the word we would use a dictionary or the Google search engine. During instances where I was concerned about possible misinterpretation of language, I probed the participant to elaborate on the issue being discussed. I also reworded certain questions to avoid being misunderstood by the participant. There might have been more details to share if the language barrier did not exist.

I also realized that my positionality and life experiences differentiate myself from the participants. In other words, I considered myself both an insider and an outsider. Although I am a Muslim woman and I am familiar with Iraqi culture, I am not Iraqi, nor Arab, nor do I speak Arabic. Another challenge was that my native country, Iran was at war with Iraq for 8 years. Participants asked me why I was

interested in interviewing Iraqi women, not Iranian women. I would explain to them because 2003 U.S.-led invasion was more recent and besides I believe women suffer from war in general and my own experience of war makes me sympathetic to the concerns of impacted women, no matter of their country of origin. Participants expressed the fact that two countries, Iraq and Iran, are neighbors with similarities in cultures, made them more comfortable in sharing their experiences with me. Participants were so friendly and warm and I was amazed by their hospitality, which was usually accompanied by homemade sweets. Even when I had one interview at the university, the participant came to me with a bottle of juice and said, “Even that we are not in my apartment, today you are my guest.” Participants were so willing to share their experiences, and once in a while they would say, “I hope these are helpful information,” and I had to assure them that all the information were wonderful and valuable. They trusted me as a researcher and said they were willing to help with my research in any way they could. They made phone calls and helped me schedule interviews with more Iraqi women.

One disadvantage of snowball sampling is that it produces results that are neither generalizable nor representative, since referrals may be clustered to one particular group or type of participant. One of the limitations of this data collection is that most of the participants were either OSU students or married to OSU students; they were also within the same age category. Therefore, the experiences of this younger age group may not be reflective of all Iraqi women. I checked with the community to see why they could not put me in contact with Iraqi women of various

age groups. I was told that after the fall of Saddam and the lifting of sanctions, the new government had provided numerous scholarship opportunities for students to pursue their education abroad. Based on what Iraqi women shared with me: “Basically, whoever has an admission from whatever university outside of Iraq can get a scholarship from the government”. Since leaving the country is easier for the younger generation who are not deeply rooted in the country, the most common reason for leaving Iraq was and still is education. Further, I was looking for participants who speak English, and that excluded more of the older generation.

A map of Iraq showing the locations of the 10 most polluted cities. The cities are marked with red pins: Sulaymaniyah, Samarra, Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniya, Nasiriyah, and others. The map also shows major cities like Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, and Urmia, as well as geographical features like the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Figure 4 - Participants Location Before Coming to U.S.

Yasmeen

Yasmeen is 30 years old, from Baghdad, and the mother of two. Yasmeen moved to the U.S. with her family two years ago. She was a college student when the war started. She is very concerned about the situation in her hometown, Baghdad, even to this day. She is in constant contact with her family back home to get updates about what is going on there. She likes living in the U.S. and the experience she is having, but she thinks living in another Islamic country with a culture more similar to hers would make for an easier life. She thinks it will take a long time for things to return to order in her hometown, so she prefers to move to another Muslim country with a similar culture to Iraq's.

She is worried about her family in Baghdad since she thinks every second that somebody may break into their house and harm her family. The most remarkable memory of the war for her is how hard it was to get into her university with all the checkpoints and insecurity. The result was being exhausted and stressed out all the time.

"My jaw joints are very painful. I couldn't stand it anymore, so I went to see a doctor. His first question was: do you grind or clench your teeth during sleep? Yes I do! Do you know when it all started? When I was 18 and war started! I was so scared and although I was 18 I asked my mom and dad to let me sleep in a same room with them. After few nights they told me I was grinding my teeth the whole night. I can remember all those horrible memories... all the stress of possibility of getting killed... my loved ones or myself. This jaw pain is a reminder of those nights for me. Doctor

said I would probably need a jaw surgery. I wish I could have a memory surgery too... to remove all those bad memories."

Ishtar

Ishtar is a single Iraqi woman from Baghdad. As a woman who does not cover her hair, Ishtar faced a lot of discrimination and harassment after the war in Iraq. It became a main reason for her to leave the country and continue her education in the U.S. two years ago. She was a student when the war started and worked for a non-profit health organization in Iraq after her graduation for two years. After that she received her admission to OSU. She misses her family, but the situation in Iraq prevents her from going back and visiting them. As she says, she is enjoying the state of feeling "safe" in the U.S. and doing the activities that she desires to do. She can name countless simple activities that she could not perform during the war and the unstable situation after the war.

"I used to go to school just with my private driver who I trusted. I could not go alone and I could not trust taxis and buses. When we were on streets we could hear sounds of shootings and explosions from far and near. You can imagine how scared I was. Sometimes I had to duck down in the car because they were randomly shooting at cars on the streets. Shootings were everywhere; Sometimes we were at the university in the classroom, and we heard sounds of shootings were getting closer and closer, we had to find a spot to hide to not get shot. It felt like we were in the middle of a battlefield!"

"I have a friend who was sitting in a taxi and got shot by a bullet in her shoulder. It took her forever to recover and she left the country after that. You know you are risking your life by going outside of the house for doing your everyday activities."

Shangal

Shangal is from the Kurdistan region in the north of Iraq. Shangal was a high school student when the war started. Now she is married and is the mother of two kids. The battle didn't reach there, so she believes war didn't affect her life, but she was concerned about the situation that people in other parts of her country were facing. She is planning on going back to Iraq with her family after her husband graduates from OSU. She believes her position in Iraq is secured when she goes back, since the lifting of sanctions has provided lots of job opportunities in Iraq and the Kurdistan region.

"We were mostly safe in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was the most peaceful area because since 1991 Kurdistan region became separate from other parts of Iraq. War didn't change anything for me for going to school or going outside the house. Streets were safe as before and they are still safe. Just one time during the war and when Saddam was in hiding, we heard that he might be in Sulaymaniyah, a city in Kurdistan that we were living in at the time. We were scared so all the people escaped from the situation and we went to a village for 2-3 days until we heard Saddam was not in Sulaymaniyah and we could go back home. That is the only thing I can remember."

“When I came to the U.S., and I can see the situation here, my idea about the U.S. invasion of Iraq changed fundamentally. They went to Iraq claiming they want to bring human rights to Iraq. I accepted that as one of the major reasons at the moment. Then when we came here to the U.S. and we can see how they take care of even animals, cats and dogs, they have rights in this country. But in Iraq, the U.S. army killed ordinary people and kids easily in the name of bringing us human rights. It doesn’t make any sense to me.”

Zaineb

Zaineb is from Baghdad. She is a mother of three kids and has been in the U.S. for 2.5 years. Zaineb attends English classes and hopes to get into the university soon. She was single when the war started in Iraq, and married in 2007: “we could not even have a small wedding party... things were really harsh in 2007.” She describes herself as a “very sensitive person.” When she was in Iraq she went to visit families who were living under poverty and difficulties caused by war, and she helped them as much as she could. She describes her help as *“nothing compared to their needs and their situation.”* Witnessing dead bodies on the streets left her sleepless for nights. When she tells me about her memories of war I can’t consider her overly sensitive anymore; no matter the person’s level of sensitivity one cannot overcome such experiences easily. She felt compassion for single mothers selling goods on the streets or even begging for money to provide a little food for their families: *“I could not put*

food in my mouth for days, the image of those women and those kids kept coming to my mind.”

“It was three weeks after our marriage ceremony. I woke up one morning, the sun was shining into my room; I opened the balcony door stepped outside to get fresh air. Some dogs were in the open field in front of our balcony. They were eating something... I became curious to know what they were fighting over to eat... I was breathless for moments... they were eating a human body. I was frozen and shocked. Is this fair? You came here, you killed him, and you left him here to be eaten by dogs? Do you do such a thing to even animals? I couldn't stop thinking about that person's family... Were they waiting for him to go back home? Did they know he was killed? Did they know that dogs were eating their loved one? I never ever can forget that horrible scene. It still brings tears to my eyes...”

Zahra

Zahra is from Najaf. Zahra was single and in her last year of high school when the war started in 2003. She is 28 years old now. She received her bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering, got married and moved to the U.S. in 2011. She gave birth to both of her kids here in the U.S. and became a full-time busy mom. After having conversations about women's rights with her new friends here in the U.S., Zahra believes laws in her country were and are very supportive of women if only people follow them. She blames U.S. policies for many challenges Iraqis have faced in the last few decades.

“Education is very important for us even in the middle of the war. I remember I had a final exam in my last year in high school. I had studied and was all ready for the exam. On the day of our exam, like other days, there were lots of explosions and shootings on the street. We were taking the exam and we could hear it all [pause] it was so loud [pause] I remember our teacher who was overseeing the exam told us “even if the ceiling falls down, you should finish your exam! It is important for your future!” [laughter]. I was so worried because my dad was outside waiting for me to finish my exam. I can’t believe I finished and passed [laughter].

Lobna

Lobna is from Al-Diwaniyah. She is 33, married and has two kids. When the war started she was in her last year of college. She was working at a university in Iraq before moving to the U.S. She has been in the U.S. for less than a year and misses her home and family. She believes there might be some positive aspects of this war, but says, “It’s a very sad story in general, to watch my country being destroyed in this way.” She says that as a “strong Iraqi woman,” she always fights for her rights, “even if people don’t like to see a woman fighting to get her rights.” She misses her home country and hopes to go back soon.

“Let me tell you my story. My husband got his university admission to come to the U.S. He came here a few months earlier than our kids and me. I was an instructor at the university, which means I was dealing with the best and the most educated people

of my country. I had a husband who was alive and used to work in the same university and people knew him. You can't imagine how many hurtful comments and demands I received. They were asking me bad things. I got into fights with them. They thought because my husband was not there they can make me do things or they can attack me. I got into fights with them to protect myself... to protect my kids, to protect my future. That turned out to be a good story because I had a husband and I could fight back. Now imagine a woman whose husband or father was killed in the war... how hard things are for them in this society. They get harassed because there is no one to defend them. I could fight back, I fight for my rights, but there are many women who are suffering from this situation."

Faidh

Faidh is from the city of Shatra. She is 34 years old and has three kids. She was in her last year of undergraduate studies when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003. After her graduation she became a history teacher. She loved her job as a teacher and enjoyed her time working with kids. She was single when the war started and got married in 2005. She moved to the U.S. with her family two years ago and became a full-time mom. She lost her sister to cancer during the war: *"I blame it on war, there is a sharp rise in cancer in Iraq after the war, I think it is because of the radiation of weapons."* Her main focus during the interview was health issues that many Iraqi women are going through as a result of the war.

“One of our neighbors had a son who was the best friend of my brother. He was such a nice guy and we all loved him so much. One day, during the war, he just opened their home door, and the moment he stepped out, a U.S. Army aircraft shot him. That was a horrible incident; I still remember that day all in detail and can never forget it. It affected my family and I deeply. He was killed without any reason, I can never forget that day.”

Maryam

Maryam is from Baghdad. She is 25 years old. It's been less than a year since she got married and moved to the U.S. so her husband could pursue his education at OSU. She was a high school student when war started and she continued her education with her Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. She does not cover her hair and recalls the harassment she received on the streets of Iraq, especially in 2006. As she mentions, Al-Qaeda were everywhere and they used every opportunity to make Iraqis fear them.

“One time we were in class and we heard a loud sound of a glass shattering. Later we realized somebody was shooting at the other class from the window. It was so horrible and scary. Imagine studying in the university with such level of insecurity. We were so afraid and I could not concentrate on my studies. It happened all the time that I was studying and I heard a bomb and I was thinking that I could be killed in that bombing; any of my family or friends could be killed at any moment. It was so much tension. We were all afraid and scared, it was not just me, we were all afraid.”

“It happened many times that in the middle of the night a very loud sound awakened me. I was all shocked and our whole house was shaking... another bomb... another explosion, the windows of the first floor were shattered over and over... we couldn’t even have a peaceful rest during the night.”

Shams

Shams is from Nasiriyah. She is 41 years old and the mother of three. When the war started in 2003, it had been four years since she had married and moved to Libya with her husband. In 2006 they went to India to pursue their education, “to be able to serve our country better,” as she states. She received her master’s degree in civil engineering with a specialty in structural engineering in 2008. She went back to Iraq in 2008 with the hope of “helping build my country.” She faced unexpected challenges to find a proper job when she returned to Iraq: *“When we went back everything was so disappointing. Whoever was in power at Universities was still in power, because people can change face easily.”* After overcoming many obstacles, Shams became an instructor at a university in Baghdad. But again she and her husband decided to pursue their education. They moved to the U.S. six months ago, after receiving admission from Oregon State University.

She is glad that the situation for Shia Muslims got much better with the fall of Saddam Hussein, which put an end to years of discrimination against Shia Muslims. Shams says: *“Now there is equal opportunity for Shia and Sunnis for education... no*

discrimination for Shia and Sunnis, and since Shias are more, they get more scholarships. It doesn't mean they give scholarships to Shias more. Before, opportunities of scholarship were only for Sunnis and West of Iraq.”

“In 2008 I went to Iraq after 8 years. My brother came to Iran-Iraq border to pick us up, since we were entering from the Iranian border. We were so excited to see our country after 8 years, but on the way home many many times, streets were closed, everybody was stopped so U.S. cars and U.S. Army could pass. We felt so sad to see how our country was occupied. It was so difficult, U.S. was dominating the situation and we as Iraqis felt weak, we felt as if our country is not for us. Sometimes we saw American soldiers in markets or on the streets; they were friendly but to tell you the truth we knew this friendliness that they were showing was fake! They invaded our country, they were killing people, they destroyed everything and they were smiling at us at the market!”

Rayaheen

Rayaheen is originally from Baghdad, but had lived in Al-Ramadi for most of her life. She is 30 years old. She says her family decided to stay in Al-Ramadi since it was very safe, especially for women, and they had developed a supportive community there. She got married in 2007 and now she has two boys. Rayaheen’s husband was admitted to Oregon State University and they moved to the U.S. three months prior to this research.

"I was a student at university when war started in 2003. There were lots of the explosions then and 3-4 times I witnessed them myself. One time, a suicide bomber killed himself at the main entrance of the university, at the gate. Few minutes after the explosion I got there, I saw his parts exploded all around. That was so horrible for me to see such a scene, I went back home and I couldn't even talk for a week. It was a first time for me to see such a horrible thing. In this incident only he was dead because police figured out few seconds before his entrance and shot him. But one time one of my classmates died in one of the explosions in front of the university. I know many people who lost their loved ones. One day, one of my relatives who was a good friend of mine went to the market to do grocery shopping. She went with her brother and one other family member. There was an explosion in there and all of them died. It affected us deeply and we still can't believe what happened to them. Living in Iraq is very hard. It is not easy to deal with all the stress and problems in there. But we have to continue our lives, we gradually learned how to face these situations to be able to continue our lives."

Chapter Six - Findings

This chapter presents the findings through thematic analysis of the interviews. Four themes that emerged from the interviews are discussed in this chapter: (1) Gender-Based Violence; (2) The Rescue Narrative; (3) Long Lasting Physical and Psychological Harm; and (4) Poverty and Female-Headed Households.

Gender-Based Violence

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines (2005) describe gender-based violence as “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females” (p. 7). This guideline for Gender-based Violence interventions in humanitarian settings also highlights the “relationship between females’ subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence” (p. 7). In another definition by Bloom (2008), the significance of the context in which the violence takes place is highlighted:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society. (Bloom, 2008, p14)

So, it is important to emphasize that the social context of a country can be changed by different factors; most notable among these is war. Most of the

participants mentioned that Iraq's society had been changed profoundly after the invasion. As noted by Al-Ali (2005), a general state of anarchy and chaos is endemic in post-war situations, which exacerbates constructions of masculinity promoted during conflict. One of the participants, Lobna, describes the dramatic changes that took place in Iraqi society and reflects somberly on the ramifications of war on the people:

“My country was destroyed to below zero. I don't see any hope for future [pause] because they destroyed people. It is easy when you destroy something, you can make another thing, but when you destroy people you can't make another people... our society's morality had been killed in this war.”

Despite the end of conflict, excessive aggression and insecurity, which was caused by war is still present in Iraq. The situation, especially for women, changed a lot in Iraq in different ways. The participants exhibited keen interest in the gender-based violence theme. They discussed it through various issues: kidnapping, street harassment and forced hijab.

Kidnapping.

Kidnapping was one of the topics that came up in every single interview. Each of the participants believes that the situation in Iraq is not safe for women. After discussing it more, they all pointed to kidnappings as the main factor creating a

climate of fear among women. Kidnapping is also the primary concern that inhibits the mobilization of Iraqi women in the public sphere.

Kidnapping is a socially sensitive issue in a traditional patriarchal society, so there is lack of official statistics on the topic. Yet, based on what participants have shared during the interviews, before the war kidnapping was very rare in Iraq but after the invasion it became very common. The major reason mentioned by participants was the general climate of insecurity caused by the war, which terrified the population. Participants said that Saddam Hussein's fall from power also caused a downfall of status apparatuses, e.g. Iraqi police, linked to him. In addition, their connection to the Ba'ath party forced them out of the newly established power. With the end result of total insecurity or as Rayaheen put it: "you can imagine what will happen in a country with no police.. In addition to the police, the border patrol mechanism was also displaced. At the same time, the borders became open since there were no security guards to protect the borders. Women who I interviewed mostly believed that many Al-Qaeda extremists entered Iraq, and they are the main reason driving Iraq toward chaos. Rayaheen says: "Any person could easily enter Iraq. Many of the Al-Qaeda entered Iraq, it was the worst thing could happen to our country." So, the lack of law and order inside war-torn Iraq, in addition to the new intrusion of armed groups, led to the general lack of security in Iraq. I was curious to know the participants point of view on who benefits from the general instability in Iraq. One of the participants, Zahra, replies:

“I really think the U.S. let the Al-Qaeda people to enter Iraq to ensure the state of Iraq would be unstable; The U.S. maybe wants to go back to Iraq because the situation in Iraq is unstable and they want to claim to build Iraq, but in reality to take over the country. That is what I and many other people in Iraq think.”

Iraqi people think, according to Zahra, that the U.S. has helped Al-Qaeda into Iraq to ensure a longtime instability there. While this is speculation, one thing is for sure: lawlessness was not a high priority for the U.S. military. As Al-Ali (2005) mentions, the U.S. military protected the Ministry of Oil and Finance, but not other places. Zahra believes the reason is because the U.S. can eventually benefit from the chaos situation in Iraq. This strategic decision on the part of the U.S. military during the early days of the invasion has had long-term ramifications on the security situation in Iraq. In 2011, Barak Obama declared an end to the Iraq war, but the situation is still chaotic in Iraq. It's been 11 years to date that many Iraqi people have been living in an unstable and insecure situation. Lobna explains the continuous lack of security in Iraq:

“It is wartime until now. U.S. troops are not there anymore, but many groups of people think the U.S. is responsible for the situation in Iraq now. I don't see any difference between 2010 or 2011 when the war officially ended; or 2012, when I left the country; or today when I still hear devastating news from my family.”

The main aspect of this general instability for Iraqi women is widespread kidnappings and the horrors surrounding them. The fear of kidnapping—due to the general climate of insecurity—trapped many Iraqi women inside their houses. Participants declared that they were not able to go outside their homes without having a male “bodyguard.” Having a male companion would reduce the chance of getting kidnapped significantly, although it would not guarantee it. All the insecurity and the fear of being kidnapped didn’t stop any of the participants in this study from pursuing their education. To be able to finish their education, participants mentioned the different tactics they had to use to get into the university (e.g. having a male companion, using a school bus or private driver). But as Zahra mentions, many Iraqi girls were prevented from pursuing their education:

“I usually went to university with my dad or brother, or with a group of my friends. I would not go alone because it was not safe at all. I was able to get my degree in Mechanical Engineering. But it was not the case for many other Iraqi girls. There were many families who did not let their girls continue their education, because they were so worried [about their safety]. They did not want to risk their daughters’ lives. Shootings, bombings, or kidnapping, could put an end to the girl’s life.”

I was intrigued by Zainab’s comment, “Kidnapping would put an end to a girl’s life,” and asked her if she could elaborate on what she meant by that and how

kidnapping could put an end to one's life. Zainab mentioned that in many cases a girl who has been kidnapped would be raped and killed. She explained that even if the girl comes back home, she cannot go outside the home any more because of the "shame" and "dishonor" now associated with her kidnapping. Zahra elaborated on that point by mentioning that even if the family is supportive of the kidnapped girl, the Iraqi society still doesn't accept the girl. Lobna explains that because many people know each other in the neighborhood, "every one will find [out] that a girl has been kidnapped, and it is assumed that she was raped, [whether] she was or not, and there is no chance for that girl to get married or live a normal life afterward." The participants touched upon the importance of shame and honor in the patriarchal Iraqi society, which are often times associated with the expectations of virginity for young unmarried girls. Such intricate societal values have been complicated by gendered-based violence that has increased during the war.

It is also important to note that the kidnapping of "Westerners" received vast media attention while for the kidnapping of Iraqi women, which occurs in more significant numbers, has not been mentioned in "Western" media.

Street harassment and forced hijab.

I will never forget the first time I heard from an Iraqi friend that religious extremists had become more powerful after the invasion. One of the justifications for the "war on terror" was "liberating" women in those countries, but after the invasion more fundamentalists gained power in Iraq and placed more restrictions on women.

As Yasmeen shared with me: “Yeah... borders are open and there are Al-Qaeda people all over Iraq. Before people were just suffering from one dictator, Saddam Hussein, but now we have many Saddams in Iraq.” By “many Saddams,” Yasmeen is referring to the extremist groups, especially Al-Qaeda, who infiltrated the country after the downfall of the security apparatuses of Saddam’s regime.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of State estimated that there were between 1000 to 2000 Al-Qaeda members in Iraq. They are the largest Sunni extremist group in Iraq and mainly located in Baghdad, Fallujah, and Najaf¹². One of the main issues that people related to Al-Qaeda caused for Iraqi women was street harassment, and the main targets were women who were not covering their hair and bodies. These women were harassed on streets and forced to cover themselves. Many of the participants mentioned the hardship faced by women who did not cover their hair or who did not cover their bodies “properly.” Ishtar says:

“I am more afraid now, when I was there after the invasion. Because I knew that it was not just harassment, it could progress to something more, as we see there, like kidnapping or rape or killing probably, because that happens a lot. Women had been killed because [they] didn't wear scarf [hijab]; or [the extremists] didn't like a woman's

¹² U.S. Department of State. “Iraq” Country Reports on Terrorism. UN Refugee Organization. 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,IRQ,,4e5248272d,0.html>

way of practicing Islam or whatever. That didn't happen before [the invasion].”

Ishtar explained that because she didn't want to wear hijab she refused to go outside her house for months, but then she decided to wear hijab in order to be able to go to work. Maryam also told me her hijab story:

“I don't wear hijab. Women who didn't wear hijab had more problems. Sometimes because I was not wearing hijab I would get harassed and I had to wear hijab to avoid that... I was forced to wear hijab. People from Al-Qaeda or people from Iraq who didn't like U.S. would force women to cover themselves more. These extremists could even kill women because they were not wearing hijab or just because they were wearing jeans. We heard about such stories a lot. You could not find women wearing jeans or without hijab on streets.”

Religious conservatism became another justification for violence against women. Forcing a woman to wear what she is not voluntarily willing to is another form of gender-based violence. Islamic extremists, who were empowered after the invasion, put many such restrictions on Iraqi women's mobility in the public sphere. Rayaheen says women in Ramadi, which is a city in central Iraq, were usually protected from street harassment and assault because of the supportive community. But after the invasion and rise of Al-Qaeda they also faced lots of problems: “Women

had to cover even their faces in Ramadi. We heard that a girl didn't cover her face and those Al-Qaeda people painted her face by spray. That was ridiculous [laughter].”

Poor security results in limited mobility for women. The lack of basic security in the streets, roadblocks, inadequate police force, and the feeling of fear, anxiety and despair are factors, which affect Iraqi women and limit their mobility:

“Girls are afraid of bombs and bad people who would hurt us as women, they may harass you, so we need our guards, we need our brothers we need them to protect us. Harassment became a lot more after the war” (Lobna)

Harassment and insecurity forced Iraqi women to become more dependent on their male relatives. Women were not able to go outside the house by themselves and were being pushed out of public life, which disempowered them.

The Rescue Narrative

“Rescuing” women of color who are outside of the U.S. borders has been much discussed in Transnational Feminist debates. One of the justifications of invasion was bringing human rights, especially women’s rights, to Iraq. According to the Bush administration, the U.S. war was going “to help Iraqi women give birth to freedom.” As Abu-Lughod discusses, if “Westerners” want justice and rights for women in Afghanistan and Iraq, they should consider that what those women want for themselves might be different from what had envisioned for them by the “West.”

Mohanty also critiques “Western” feminists for looking at “Third World” women as a singular monolithic group. The rescue narrative that was used to justify the “War on Terror” was similar to what Spivak calls “white men rescuing brown women from brown men”. In this context, and without concern for the real issues confronting Iraqi women, Islam and the culture in Iraq and Afghanistan was used as a tool to portray women over there as oppressed and in need of rescue by the “West.”

“Freedom From What?”

Although it was not initially one of my interview questions, after participants shared with me how life in Iraq has been complicated since the invasion and much worse than before, I added this question: One of the justifications to invade Iraq was bringing freedom for Iraqi women; one idea was that the invasion would “help Iraqi women to give birth to freedom.” What do you think about this statement? Based on what you have witnessed in Iraq, how would you compare Iraqi women’s situation before and after the war?

Yasmeen immediately responded: “Freedom from what?” After conducting several interviews, I found that this was the first question asked by many of them: “Freedom from what?” This critique of war was at most times direct and heated, as women announced their disapproval of a war that took away their loved ones and disrupted the normalcy of their lives. Here, these women were resisting war in a process that begins with criticism as the first stage. From questioning the reasons for war to direct criticism, as in Yasmeen, these women find a way to protest against war

and its injustices. Yasmeen says: “Freedom from what? [laughter] It really makes me laugh. Women are now living in the worst situation in their lives in Iraq. Freedom from what? They [women] lost their husbands, their sons, or maybe they don’t have food to eat. Freedom from what?” Yasmeen also provides examples of many Iraqis who still don’t have access to electricity or clean water as basic needs because “everything was ruined in the war.”

Ishtar asks this very interesting question: “Do you know anything more basic than the right of walking on the streets? Women can’t go outside of their homes without so much stress... they are so scared all the time. The situation is very bad in Iraq. What kind of freedom do they talk about?” I didn’t have any answer to that question either.

I heard repeatedly that the situation for Iraqi women was better during Saddam Hussein’s time in general. Participants pointed to two major problems before the war: economic sanctions, which led to widespread poverty, and political repression.

The main reason for poverty in Iraq before the invasion was UN sanctions: “*Hesar Eqtesadi* [economic sanctions] put Iraqis under lots of pressure. Salaries were very low...people had to have 2-3 jobs to make enough money for their families. It was [the] people who suffered the most, and it didn’t affect Saddam and people who were close to him at all. After [the] invasion and [the] lift of [the] sanctions salaries are much higher,” Yasmeen recalled. So, the economic sanctions had direct

ramifications on the lives of ordinary Iraqis, but not the people who are close to the circle of power. If the invasion has a positive side that may be it: lifting economic sanctions and reducing the general poverty that ordinary people bore the brunt of. On the other hand, the participants were clear that the invasion has brought no freedom for Iraqi women. They shared with me during their interviews stories about the relative freedoms that women had amassed under the rule of the secularist Ba'ath party. Zahra, for example, who believes that the Iraqi laws were supportive of women in general, captures the complexities of the situation of women prior to the invasion:

“I think the law of Iraq has many paragraphs about women's rights and to keep the rights for women; there was no need anyone give them the freedom. But the problem in my country was the government of Saddam Hussein, because the government prevented many rules to be applied.”

Zahra also told me about the conversations she has with her American friends once in a while about women's situation in the U.S. and Iraq. It was amazing for me to hear: “If the U.S. wants freedom for Iraqi women, why U.S. don't give freedom to U.S. women? Many women here suffer from injustice, why U.S. want to give us freedom when many women here suffer from injustice?” What Zahra says here, Leila Ahmad has discussed broadly under the name Colonial Feminism. Ahmad argues that, although colonialism was mainly for economical benefit, women's emancipation was used as a tool for geopolitical invasion. Colonial feminism “introduces the notion

that an intrinsic connection existed between the issue of culture and the status of women, and... that progress for women could be achieved only through abandoning the native culture” (Ahmed 1992, p.244). On the anniversary of September 11, Bush told the *New York Times*, “the oppression of women are everywhere and always wrong.” But as Viner (2002) discusses:

At home, Bush is no feminist. On his very first day in the Oval office, he cut off funding to any international family-planning organizations which offer abortion services or counseling (likely to cost the lives of thousands of women and children); this year he renamed January 22 - the anniversary of Roe vs. Wade which permitted abortion on demand - as National Sanctity of Human Life Day and compared abortion to terrorism: "On September 11, we saw clearly that evil exists in this world, and that it does not value life... Now we are engaged in a fight against evil and tyranny to preserve and protect life.

This is a contemporary example of how colonialism uses the emancipation of women in the target region as an excuse, while ignoring the challenges women face within its own society, as here in the U.S.

Zahra also points to the U.S. support in suppressing Iraqi Shias and Kurds who were against Saddam Hussein during the 1990 and 1991 uprisings. Zahra says many Iraqis think that the U.S. was supporting Saddam and gave him weapons to fight protesters. Zahra states: “So if the U.S. wanted to give women freedom, why it

didn't do that in 1991? Why now?" U.S. foreign policy regarding Iraq had major shifts over the years that make Iraqis suspicious of the likelihood of any good intention for the sake of Iraqis.

Rahayeen shared with me the restrictive political situation, lack of freedom of speech, and the fear to speak against Saddam or the Ba'ath party because they would get arrested immediately. I asked Rayaheen if she is now happy that Saddam is finally gone, and she replied: "We didn't like Saddam, but we didn't like the U.S. war either. Home is more valuable than Saddam. We didn't want to see our home destroyed like that." She was saying that even under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein their country was functioning well compared to the chaos that came with war and after the fall of Saddam.

Shams told me stories of when she was looking for a job and how she faced discrimination for being a woman in the past few years. She says Iraq's society changed a lot and "people are losing their morals," which all started after the sanctions and became worse after the invasion. She says:

"Freedom from what? Our society gave us freedom from beginning. People respected women... and in job they treated with us very respectfully, very helpfully. Freedom from what? If they say not freedom for women but freedom from Saddam Hussein and his party, that make sense."

In defining this situation, Shams points out, “If they wanted to help Iraqi women, why didn’t they ask us what we want?” Iraqi women are the ones who should be heard to understand what their needs are. These narratives portray Iraqi women as active agents in their new context and not simply as passive recipients of their current living conditions. They are the ones who know best the situation in their country, who know their own demands, and are the best sources to identify the surest path to gaining their rights.

Long Lasting Physical and Psychological Harm

War can affect almost every aspect of society and the lives of citizens. However, the long lasting physical and psychological harms are among the significant effects of war on individuals. Studies show that women suffer from these problems during and after conflict more so than men (Murthy and Lakshminarayana, 2006). A study by Kohli and Showkat (2013) shows that war affects women more because they are more vulnerable to “marginalization, poverty and the suffering engendered by armed conflict, especially when they are already victims of discrimination in peacetime” (p. 270). For this study, when I asked participants how they think war affected their lives, they mainly pointed to the constant psychological pressure.

All the participants in this study mentioned how they were living in stress and fear all the time. When Ishtar was talking about the tension and stress that she and all her family was living in I asked her how that affected her family's mental health.

Ishtar, who is a public health student, links psychological and physical issues together:

“You know... the psychological things, and the stress, would affect your physical health and well being too. This is something and the other important thing is the mental health. Because you are very stressful and unsafe... yeah everybody was affected, me and my family and my friends, it was very severe. It was an all time nightmare. I think I need time to detoxify from whatever happened over there.”

There are lots of bombings happening in Iraq, especially in Baghdad, as of this day. Yasmeen says, “If one day goes with no car bombing we will be surprised then.” Yasmeen points to the effects of the bombings on the people who are near the site of the explosion:

“When we hear there were a bombing and some people were killed we say: good for them! They were lucky! What happened to people around them? You know people lose their body parts and have to live with that for the rest of their lives, not considering mental issues that being in such situation can bring. It is better to be dead rather than living with these difficulties.”

One of the main health issues that civilians encounter is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As an example, a study based on Lebanon's civil war shows that

women who were exposed to human traumas that occurred to themselves or to their families had three times higher cardiovascular disease mortality risk, compared to non-exposed women (Sibai, Fletcher, and Armenian, 2001).

There are many reports on epidemic cancer and birth defects in Iraq linked to war (Gordts 2013, Al-Azzawi 2013, Morrison 2012). Based on *The Independent's* report (2012): “High rates of miscarriage, toxic levels of lead and mercury contamination and spiraling numbers of birth defects ranging from congenital heart defects to brain dysfunctions and malformed limbs have been recorded.” Due to the lack of documentation and reporting, there are no accurate statistics available on war-related health issues. Although there are official statistics by the Iraqi government, the actual numbers should be much higher. As an example of increasing cancer cases in Iraq, official reports from the Iraqi government show that before the First Gulf War (1991) the cancer rate among Iraqis was 0.04 percent. In 1995 the cancer rate was 20 times higher than 1991. By the year 2005 the cancer rate among Iraqis was 1.6 percent, and current estimates show the trend is increasing.¹³ One of the participants, Faidh, points to increasing cancer and different types of birth defects as a consequence of war:

“A lot of women who inhaled the chemicals from explosions during the war now are having lots of health issues especially mental issues, some of them lost their memory. Cancer rate is increasing everyday in

¹³ Iraq: War's legacy of cancer. (March, 15, 2013). AlJazeera.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/03/2013315171951838638.html>

Iraq. The pressure and tensions of war and loud sounds made many women sick. Many women are giving birth to deformed babies. This is a huge tragedy for us. ”

Faidh also points out that she lost her sister in 2003 because of cancer, which she believes was the effect of “radioactive weapons” being used in war.

Poverty and Female-headed Households

Female-headed households have steadily become an issue in post-war Iraq. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that there are one-to-two million households in Iraq, which are headed by women.¹⁴ These women mainly became the heads of family after their husbands were dead, missing or detained. Although none of the participants considered themselves as head of the family, all of them expressed their concerns about Iraqi widows. All participants had one or more of these female-headed households in their extended family, in addition to having seen such female-headed households in their neighborhoods. As my research has indicated, there is a huge increase in the number of Iraqi widows as a result of the war. In Iraq’s patriarchal culture, men are responsible to finance, support, and provide for their families. As Lobna has clarified: “Many of Iraqi women don’t work outside the house because they don’t have to. Because in general they are well provided by

¹⁴ 1. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), “Iraq: Women Struggle to Make Ends Meet”. Jan-Feb 2011, available at <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/2011/iraq-update-01-02-2011-icrc-eng.pdf>

their husbands or fathers.” This societal structure has unfortunately been disrupted by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

All of a sudden, Iraqi women are faced with an unprecedented epidemic: the death of the head of family. This leaves them in the awkward situation of becoming the sole caregivers of their families. Based on what participants shared during the interviews, there are many women on Iraq’s streets begging for money or willing to do any job they can do to get food for their kids. This dire situation that Iraqi women find themselves in leads them to prematurely terminate their kids’ educational trajectory, and direct them to find material resources urgently needed for the family survival. Although education is free in Iraq at all levels, these families can’t afford to buy stationary or clothing for their kids to be able to stay in school. This is a dramatically different situation than what families encountered before the U.S.-led invasion. Yasmeen, for example, mentions even with all the economical difficulties before the war and due to sanctions, there was a free food program under which every Iraqi family could receive certain amount of food for free monthly, despite their income. Yasmeen says the food prior to the invasion was basic, but was enough to feed the family. But after the invasion, the food program had been stopped due to the country’s general political and economic corruption

Female Iraqis who lose their men not only have to struggle to feed their families, but they also face other challenges. Lobna points to the “supportive” role of men in Iraqi families and what happens when a woman loses this support: “they get

harassed because there is no one to defend them; it is not culturally acceptable for women to fight back. I have always fought for my rights. I wish more women do that, especially women who don't have anyone to support them. They may be asked to do 'bad' things." As I have mentioned in Lobna's narrative in her profile, women who don't have a male partner to "protect" them suffer from harassment in different ways. Lobna says: "There are women who had a husband, a father, a brother who was killed in the war. Things are very bad for these women. They are alone with their children and there is no one to support them. They don't have enough money to survive. It is very difficult to raise children without fathers in this situation in these bad days." Zaineb mentions how she and many other Iraqi individuals try to help these women in need, but she notes, "they are a lot and there is not much we as individuals can do." As some of the participants shared, there is no governmental program to support families who are financially insecure. I asked Zaineb about Non-Governmental Organizations who could help these women, and she said there are few NGOs and they cannot answer the need of this rising population of female-headed families. Figure 5, shows the income sources of female-headed households, based on a 2012 report, which confirms what participants shared.

Income Sources of Assessed FHHs

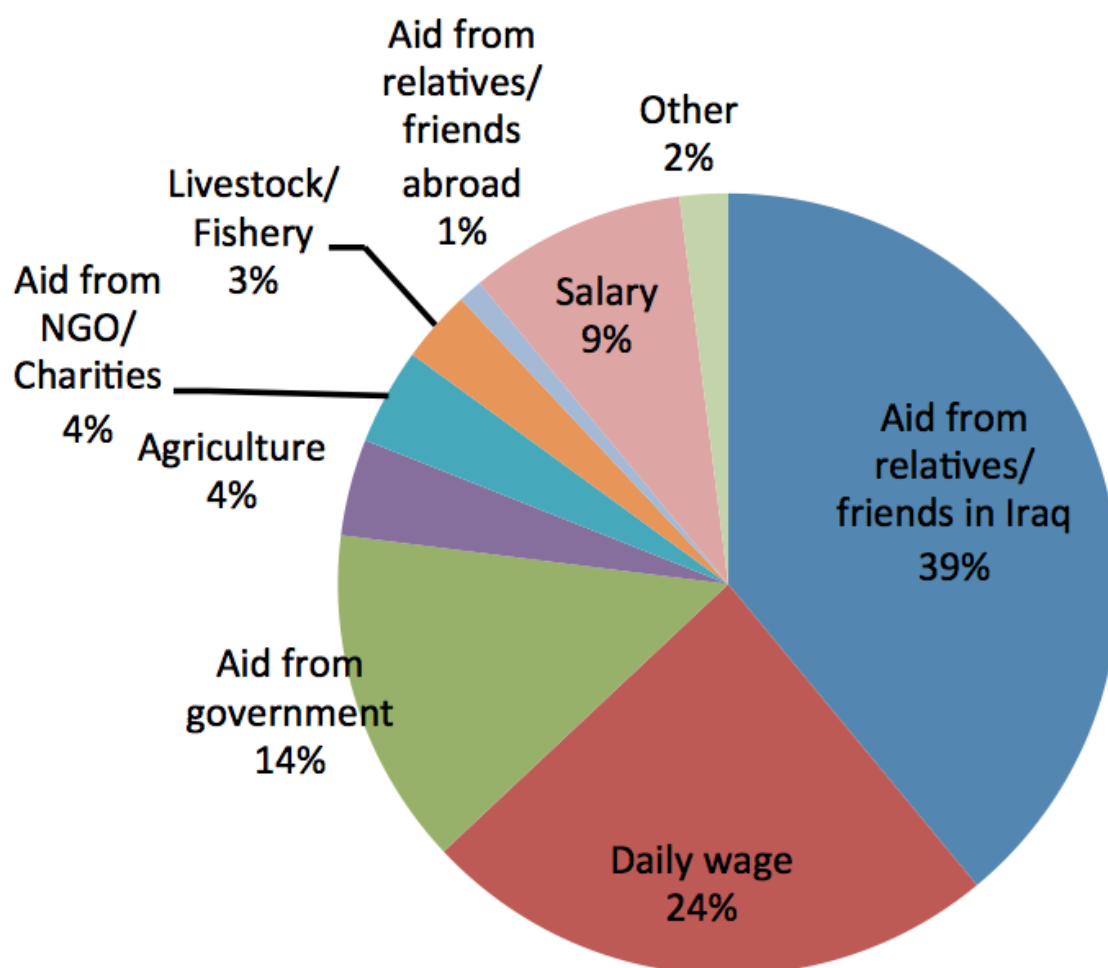


Figure 5 – Income Sources of Assessed FHHs

Source: International Organization for Migration-Iraq, Special Report Female Headed Households, 2012

The stories told through the interviews that I held for this research are very telling. The major problem that faces Iraqi women in the post-war era is survival within a patriarchal society. These women are left to fend for themselves while having to navigate the patriarchal society. The issues they face are not only those of day-to-day struggles for survival—which is immense—but also those of having to navigate the patriarchal society where male support is necessary. This can be tied to the theme I identified previously about the lack of general security in the public sphere for women. The lack of male support is compounded with the absence of the male breadwinner for households where women all of a sudden find themselves in dire need to fend for themselves and to navigate the patriarchal society, which might not be prepared to give them the necessary support but is all too willing to hold them to the patriarchal societal norm. These stories indicate, as Spivak has explicated, the impossibility yet the dire need for the subaltern to be heard. In discussing the female Iraqis who have suddenly and unwittingly found themselves heading households in a patriarchal society—one that holds them to the strictest ethos of these societies—we must question our ability to listen to the subaltern.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

Former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami's idea of "Dialogue among Civilizations" attracted a lot of pacifists' attention during a time of increased hostility between the "West" and "East." Promoting dialogue among civilizations refutes Samuel Huntington's theory of "The Clash of Civilizations" (1993). Huntington believed that cultural conflicts between civilizations would be the source of clashes (22). His positioning "Islam" and the "West" as two incompatible "cultures" is attention grabbing, as he was actually looking at Islam as a culture and failed to make the distinction between Islam as a set of religious beliefs and the different cultures centered around it in various places in the world. It is important to take a look at how U.S. discourses that emphasized the clash between Western and Middle Eastern cultures influenced the drive to war, and effectively ended dialogue between East and West. By demonizing Islam as inherently oppressive to women, Muslim women were simultaneously silenced and used as pro-war propaganda. Racialized and gendered politics have scripted the ways Muslim women's identities and bodies are narrated, defined and regulated. As Zine (2006) explains, "located within this dialectical dynamic, the rhetoric of Muslim women's liberation is all too often caught up in the vast undercurrents of ideological extremism on one hand, and racism and Islamophobia on the other. Muslim women's feminist praxis is shaped and defined within and against these discursive terrains." In order to return to an era of peace and meaningful dialogue, Muslim women's voices must be heard through counterhegemonic discourses that complicates orientalist, stereotypical and

sensationalized representation of Muslim women and speaks to multiple audiences and transnational publics.

This research sought to elevate the voices of Iraqi women and to add their perspectives to the body of knowledge on the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which has been largely dominated by U.S.-centric discourse. The results of this study show how Islamophobia, Orientalism, and rescue narratives were used to initiate the war without considering the potential harm to people on the other side, especially women. Women in this study expressed how this war lowered the status of women in Iraq and took their very basic rights from them. People, especially women, are still living in stress and fear even after three years of declaring an official end to the war.

The rescue narratives claimed the need to “rescue” Iraqi women from Iraqi men, which repeats the same rescue narrative that Spivak explained as, “white men rescuing brown women from brown men.” The situation regarding Iraq was compounded by the particular historical moment in which Islam was demonized in U.S. popular consciousness after 9/11. Thus, Islam became the clear “other” to which Huntington and other neo-liberals directed the energies of the U.S. industrial military machine. Iraqi women were marked as a target of rescue, not only from brown men, but also from archaic religious practices, namely Islam. Little more than lip service has been paid to the lives of Iraqi women, whom this study aimed to allow a space to speak.

Participants indicated that their lives have been complicated by the US-led

invasion. The war, as they have expressed during the interviews, has lowered the living standards of Iraqi women on multiple fronts. First and foremost, the war has led to an unprecedented escalation in gender-based violence, which, as explained in my analysis, leads to the social ostracization of female victims. Second, Iraqi women believe they lost more of their rights after the invasion. One of the justifications of “War on Terror” was “a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” But what the war really resulted in for Iraqi women was preventing them from participating in public life as a result of the ongoing chaos, insecurity and violence. Third, the war has led to an increase in fear and stress levels in particular, and other traumatic symptoms associated with war in general. The effects of these have been witnessed by Iraqi women who lived through the horrors of war. These are some of the reasons that participants have given for their deteriorating living conditions after the US-led war. Fourth, the war has led to the feminization of poverty. Women became heads of households upon the sudden deaths of male breadwinners, and in many cases they are unable to provide for their families due to the high insecurity in the public sphere.

In discussing the effects of the U.S.-led war on the lives of ordinary Iraqi women who lived through it, I am calling attention to the importance of having their voices heard. These women were not parties in any power struggle nor were they politically active in any way, yet the war has affected their lives irrevocably. As Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International, says, “the women are the ones who keep life going during wars, [yet] they are the ones who are not included in

the negotiating table.”¹⁵ Lobna, one of the participants, captured this meaning when she noted, “Iraqi people are not players in their game.” It is important to realign “the negotiating table,” as Salbi puts it, or “the game” as Lobna puts it, and to bring Iraqi women to the forefront and let their voices be heard. For this to happen, it is imperative that space should be allocated for these Iraqi women to tell their stories, and for them to be heard.

¹⁵ Salbi, Z. Women, wartime and the dream of peace. TED Talk.
https://www.ted.com/talks/zainab_salbi#t-769281

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What do you think about U.S. invasion of Iraq in general? In what ways has it affected Iraqi women's lives?
2. How has women experienced war different from men?
3. What was the impact of war on your education or job? In what ways has it disrupted 'normal' life in Iraq?
4. How do you think war affected you specifically as a mother (or single woman, or single mother, or daughter)?
5. Did war have any affect on your personal relationship and your family structure? In positive ways? Negative ways?
6. Generally, in what ways do you think your life would be different if U.S. had never invaded Iraq?

Appendix B: Verbal Consent Guide

Hi, my name is Sahar Mohtashamipour and I am involved in a research study called “Iraqi Women Experiences of War “at Oregon State University.

We are trying to learn more about what Iraqi women experienced during the 2003 US-led war in Iraq. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an Iraqi woman 18 years and older who lived in Iraq during the war for at least two years. This study is being conducted by a student for the completion of a thesis. The findings of this study may be presented or published in the future.

If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in an interview and share your experiences from the war. The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours in a safe and private space of your choice. During the interview you may feel some discomfort remembering war and its consequences on your life. However, there should be no harm for you as a consequence of this interview. All the information is confidential.

Although this study is not designed to benefit you directly, by amplifying Iraqi women’s voices this study hopes to show the more realistic faces of war, and its direct effects on Iraqi women’s lives and contribute to the limited body of literature in this area.

The interview will be audio- recorded only with your consent. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want. All data that is in electronic form will be secured on a password-protected computer. All the paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The computer and filing cabinet are located in the PI's office on campus. All the data in electronic form and hard copy will be stored for three years post study termination with the same methods of protection. No real names will be used on any material collected. A pseudonym will be created for you and only the principal investigator and student researcher will know the link between the pseudonyms and identifiers. The linked list of pseudonyms and identifiers will be stored separately from the data and you will not be identifiable in publications or presentations.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

Contact information: If you have any questions about this research please contact Mehra Shirazi at Mehra.Shirazi@oregonstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu