MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

ACCESSING THE POWER WITHIN: THE CHALLENGE OF GENDER AND CULTURAL IDENTITY TO POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR:

Karen L. Sray
Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy

Academic Year 2007-08

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: _____
Approved: _____
Date: _____28 April 08_____

Oral Defense Committee Member: _____
Approved: _____
Date: _____2 Apr 08_____

Report Documentation Page

1. REPORT DATE **2008**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Accessing the Power Within: The Challenge of Gender and Cultural Identity to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Iraq**	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University,2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**29**	

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:
Accessing the Power Within: The Challenge of Gender and Cultural Identity to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Iraq

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR:
LCDR Karen L. Sray, USN

AY 07-08

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee: <u>Paula Otis, Ph.D, Professor of History</u>
Approved: _____
Date: _____

Oral Defense Committee Member: _____
Approved: _____
Date: _____

Executive Summary

Title: Accessing the Power Within: The Challenge of Gender and Cultural Identity to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Iraq

Author: LCDR Karen L. Sray, USN

Thesis: Gender and cultural identity shape the way Iraqi women participate in and contribute to society. By addressing post-conflict challenges through the lens of gender and cultural identity, the U.S. and its allies can help foster a society that ensures the protection and expansion of women's rights.

Discussion: Women's rights are influenced by a variety of cultural, religious and historical factors. These factors shape the way women participate in society, the tribe, and in the family. Islamist extremists manipulate politics and incite violence against women in order to perpetuate a patriarchal culture that marginalizes women's participation in society. Decades of war and economic sanctions have broken Iraq's economy. Once the most advanced and educated in the region, Iraqi women now struggle to support themselves and their families. Security threats and violence against women continue to escalate as Iraq's patriarchal identity is threatened by the advancement of women's rights. Reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan have suggested several strategies for facilitating women's inclusion in post-conflict rebuilding.

Conclusion: The U.S. is uniquely equipped and positioned to facilitate women's participation in Iraqi society. By negotiating with moderate religious, political and tribal leaders, the U.S. will be able to ensure that women's rights are protected.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE
INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE
VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY
OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD
INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

QUOTATION FROM, ABSTRACTION FROM, OR REPRODUCTION OF ALL OR ANY
PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PERMITTED PROVIDED PROPER
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS MADE.

Table of Contents

Preface

The process of researching and writing this paper has been a personally and professionally rewarding experience. I am sincerely indebted to all of the men and women I have spoken with for their candor, insight, and passion for both my subject and our collective mission in Iraq. However, most of all, I am in awe of the Iraqi men and women who risk ostracism from family, community, and threat to personal safety in their pursuit of a better life for women. It is their dedication and commitment that both humbles and inspires me to live my life as fully as possible.

Introduction

> If you are trying to transform a brutalized society
> into one where people can live in dignity and hope,
> you begin with the empowering of the most
> powerless. You build from the ground up.[1]
>
> Adrienne Rich, poet

Despite the initial success of the 2003 U.S. led military campaign against Iraq, the Bush administration quickly squandered the ground it had gained by failing to adequately plan for Iraq's stability, security and nation-building in the months to follow. In particular, the U.S. failed to deliver on one of its most compelling reasons for going to war: the liberation of the Iraqi people. Over 60 percent of the population remains bound, caught in the collision of theology and politics, victims of the war's aftermath in which tens of thousands are left struggling to survive without much promise of a better future.

Iraqi women remain the silent majority, fighting not only to survive but to engage in the political arena as tribal leaders, politicians, and foreign diplomats shape their future. What that future will be and how women will be represented remains a volatile subject, one that is often sacrificed in order to pacify vocal minorities within Iraq. Whether these women will succeed depends largely on the U.S. and its allies and how they approach the subject of women's rights in the months to come. Missteps now, however innocent or unintentioned, will invariably feed those factions that see women's rights as a threat to the nation's patriarchal and religious culture; failure to act deliberately and swiftly now, while the government is in its nascency, will undoubtedly be judged by future generations as a squandered opportunity to further women's political rights in Iraq.

Before the U.S. can hope to shape a government in Iraq which provides women a voice, it must understand that the challenges facing Iraqi women in the current political environ have their

roots in Islam. In order to engage Iraqi popular support, the U.S. must not only understand the

influence of Islam on the society's culture, the family, and the women themselves, but it must

also employ its resources and support in ways which respect cultural and gender differences. If

the U.S. refuses to acknowledge these differences as legitimate and continues to press a

westernized version of democratization, it will fail to effect any lasting advancement for women

or a legitimization of their political voice.

Muslim Culture in the Middle East

> Only that which was effective for the first of this
> community will be effective for the last of it.[2]
> Imam Malik (Rahimullah)

Women's rights, when viewed through an Islamic lens, must be reconciled to three

distinct spheres within Arab culture: the nation-state or society at large, the tribe/kin group, and

the individual. While change at the societal level may have the government's support and

powers of enforcement behind it, tribal leaders can seriously undermine and challenge the state's

ability to effect such change. Without the tribe's consent, individuals within the tribe will be

compelled to adapt to the will of the tribe or else be forced to move beyond the sphere of the kin

group, an often traumatic and irrevocable severing which exacts a significant toll on the

individual or family breaking away. While the individual may be perceived as the least powerful

within this triad, he or she may be able to reach beyond the barriers of family and tribe and unite

with others of the same gender for a common goal or purpose. Women, in particular, have

developed connections with other women in a myriad of ways, from negotiating prices with one

another within the informal economy, to maintaining connections with one another through an

elaborate ritual of visitation whereby family bonds are strengthened within the tribe. While

religion remains a powerful current within which these areas are shaped and influenced, it is the combined power of the state, tribe and individual that dictates the role and character of Islam in the political arena.

Although secondary to the state in terms of size and resources, the tribe remains the fulcrum about which the state and individual move. Tribal society in the Middle East is expansive, extending outwards with varying levels of inclusiveness along a common patrilineal line. It is hierarchical, with authority and respect accorded to men and elderly family members of both sexes. As the source of social and group identity, the tribe serves as a mechanism for spreading information, influencing decisions, and controlling behavior. When utilized successfully by the state, the tribe can be a potent political force, compelling both the loyalty and support of large numbers within society. However, in a highly centralized political environment or under the influence of a foreign regime, tribalism can emerge as a powerful contender for the people's support.[3]

It is within the tribal system that western definitions of equality break down. For most traditional Middle Eastern societies, a woman's concept of individual welfare is secondary to consideration of her family's welfare. When asked about her personal welfare, a woman might answer the question in terms of her assessment of the welfare of her family.[4] While this is not a fixed response and can be shaped by society, it does reflect the Middle Eastern focus on complementary vice competing roles between men and women. Leila Hessini's study of Moroccan women reflects the nature of this distinction in its discussion of western roles. Although men and women have specific duties in separate domains, the notion of equality implies that men and women have the same dispositions, capabilities, and objectives and can thus fulfill the same functions. While Western society promotes this view of equality as

contributing to a productive society of self-actualized women, it does little to address the impact on those men so displaced or to the family dynamic. Moroccan women cite the destabilizing effects of competition between the sexes on the family, and instead espouse "the reconstruction of an authentic Muslim identity [which] takes into consideration familial and societal needs that supersede individual aspirations."[5]

Women will usually seek to balance personal aspirations against the potential impact those desires would have on the stability and equanimity of the family. For them, "societal equilibrium [is] based not on equality between the sexes, but on the division of gender roles, which [finds] its most overt expression in the division of physical space."[6] This division is captured in the concept of private vs. public space. Leila Hessini identifies this designation as critical to understanding how men and women interact in Middle Eastern society. The home represents the private space in which women freely interact with other family members. Domestic chores from raising children to cooking meals mark the home as "female" space and establish a "tradition of women's autonomy" within the private world of the family home.[7] Departure from the home represents a move from private, protected space to open, male-dominated public areas. The division of space "parallels the division of gender roles: women fulfill their roles inside female space, the interior of the home, while men fulfill their roles in public space, that is, almost anywhere outside the family dwelling."[8] While these divisions remain fluid, adapting to economic demands and societal trends, they do serve to maintain the separate spheres within society and dictate the social norms for behavior and interaction.

Thus the individual female in Middle Eastern society is best examined and perhaps understood in her relation to others. Within that dynamic, honor remains the currency of standing both as perceived individually and within society: "Honor, is the value of a person in

his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride."[9] For Middle Eastern men, honor shapes the power and influence their tribe has and impacts its ability to secure resources and establish prominence within society. As Bates points out, "the most fundamental and universal component of a man's honor in the Middle East . . . is closely tied to the sexual behavior and general reputation of his womenfolk."[10] Known in Arabic as 'ard, this aspect of honor can be individual or collective, and can only be lost through the sexual misconduct of women. This link between family honor and control over women is even more critical for a culture that practices endogamy. While powerful tribes may recruit reputable women from other tribes, they do not reciprocate: "The taking of women is a sign of power and prestige, but the converse connotes relative weakness and lower prestige."[11] The stronger a tribe's 'ard, the better its position to "take" women from other tribes and increase its own power and standing. As such, women remain the foundation of a tribe's strength and the mainstay of family honor and are expected to enhance the tribe's reputation and prestige through their modesty and propriety.

In the context of both honor and private vs. public space, the role of the veil and its place in society becomes clear. As the private and public spaces begin to erode in the face of economic or outside pressures, men and women interact in ways that had previously been prohibited by Muslim society. The erosion of these spatial boundaries allows contact between men and women outside the proscribed bounds of parental control, potentially giving rein to a host of undesired behaviors. Within an Islamic and Middle Eastern code of propriety, sexual interaction and behavior remains within the private space of the home, and must be regulated for the sake of the family's honor and for society's proper functioning. Failure to do so ignores "the

inherent danger to the social order of unrestrained sexuality and the necessity for male control of female sexual behavior."[12]   Underpinning this need for male dominance is the Islamic view of women's sexuality as a powerfully disruptive force. Segregation serves to protect women from the consequences of their potent sexuality, and society from the disruption this causes within the public sphere.

As changes in society make complete segregation unrealistic, many women have turned to the veil as a way to maintain the division between the private and the public sphere. By veiling in public, women can honor this separation and still enter traditionally masculine spaces without disrupting social order. "Because a woman's space is interior," Hessini points out," she is permitted to move through the exterior only if she remains separated from it."[13]   Wearing the veil can also reflect a desire to return to more traditional or Islamic values. In the face of rapid modernization and global expansion, tradition can provide a sense of stability and certainty, especially within a society where roles have remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years. Dormant within this stability is the possibility of radical action. While the veil has become an oft cited representation of women's oppression throughout the Middle East, Nikki Keddie suggests that the opposite might actually be true: "[the veil] allows women to be activists in their own milieu and to participate in the general social and ideological trends of their times, and the current trend in many parts of the world includes a rise of religious politics."[14]   The U.S. needs to reconsider before casting "the veil" as the symbolic manifestation of female oppression; veiling simply does not avail itself to be so singularly defined. Instead, policy makers should consider the greater cultural and religious overtones of veiling and tread lightly in assigning more meaning to its practice than contextually needed or required.

<u>Women in Society—Iraq's Past and Present</u>

The personal is political.[15]
Carol Hanisch, author

Iraqi women have undergone a radical transformation in the past fifty years. Following a series of coups and false starts, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party came to long term power in 1968. Active in the party since the late fifties, Saddam Hussein cultivated a dedicated following and eventually emerged as the as the party and nation's leader in 1979. While the nation's political freedom was certainly curtailed throughout this period, Iraqi women made significant social and political gains. In 1969, the Ba'athists established a Soviet-style General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), the female arm of the party which promoted women's inclusion in the economic development process.[16] The constitution drafted in 1970 guaranteed them the right to vote, attend school, own property and run for political office. As increases in oil prices drove rapid expansion and development of the economy, Iraq turned to its own human resources and hired women to fill the gaps within the labor force. As a 1975 publication of the Ministry of Information illustrates, the Ba'ath Party was dedicated to the economic and social advancement of women:

> Iraq today witnesses a process of explosive development aiming at eradicating the inherited backwardness and building a progressive socialist society. Hence realization of rapid development entails the concentration of material and human resources, of both sexes, to contribute effectively to this process. Proceeding from this principle, the Revolution took into account realizing the full participation of women in the fruitful building process, by placing them in all spheres of production.[17]

While Iraq would undoubtedly benefit from employing its complete workforce to advance its own economy and strength as a nation, the phrase "inherited backwardness" suggests a party sentiment that saw the old customs and traditions as being outdated in a rapidly modernizing

world. On the winds of national transformation, Iraqi women soon became the most highly educated women in the region, constituting over 23% of the work force, considerably higher than other neighboring countries in the Arab Region.[18] Female literacy rates in Iraq also soared due to the nearly universal primary education for girls and boys.[19] As men sought better paying jobs in the private sector or were recruited into the army, women eagerly filled the public positions left vacant. The economic security of a government job, coupled with the growing acceptance and prestige employment outside of the home brought, allowed women to contribute to society in a more direct and visible way.

The Iran-Iraq War forced Hussein to shift his focus from production to procreation. Faced by the aggression and numerical superiority of Iran, Hussein advocated an increasingly militarized society. As the symbolic carriers of the culture, women were no longer encouraged to seek outside employment; instead, they were urged to see themselves as mothers to a nation and, more to the point, mothers of future soldiers.[20] Hussein would often refer to these newborns as the al-Qadisiyya Army, referencing a 635 AD battle between the Arab and Persian armies which put an end to Sassanid rule in Iraq.[21] By citing this battle, Hussein was able to place the political imperative of procreation within a historical framework, thus providing a moral and patriotic justification for the dismissals to come. To facilitate this transition, the government initiated a national campaign to increase the birth rate, restricting the use of contraceptives and increasing the penalties for illegally performed abortions.[22] By the end of the war, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) has established a comprehensive plan of family birthing goals, bonuses and worker's compensation packages to facilitate the move of women back into the home. For the time being, pregnancy was encouraged at the expense of productivity.

The economic burdens from both the Iran-Iraq War and subsequent invasion of Kuwait were compounded by crippling international sanctions, leaving Iraq's economy and infrastructure broken. Widespread unemployment and significant reductions in government salaries forced many women to quit their jobs and return to the domestic sphere. As Jennifer Turpin points out, women's caretaking roles become increasingly burdensome as they struggle to feed their children in adverse conditions created by war.[23] Electricity cuts, water shortages and scarcity of food made family survival an all-encompassing and time consuming activity. Education for girls, who were desperately needed at home to assist with the household, became a luxury few families could afford. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "in 1987 approximately 75 percent of Iraqi women were literate; by the end of 2000 that percentage had dropped to less than 25 percent."[24]

In an attempt to secure his power against the looming economic crisis following the 1991 Gulf War, Hussein adopted a more conservative approach to politics and began to infuse his speeches with the religious cant meant to broaden his appeal. Although traditionally a secular leader, Hussein understood the power religion held in Iraq and shrewdly asserted the moral authority of Islam for legitimacy and popular support. Hoping to secure the favor of Sunni-based religious groups and tribes, he initiated a "Faith Campaign" which began to erode the rights and legal protections women had acquired over the past two decades.[25] By embracing Islamic tribal law as a way to consolidate power, Hussein sacrificed most of the advances women had made under his regime.

U.S. Failures in Vision

> Women are a bellwether for the direction of a
> society. Both violence and progress often start
> with women.[26]
>> Zainab Salbi, founder of Women
>> for Women International

The U.S.'s dismissal of the Iraqi army at the conclusion of Phase III operations in Iraq
further compounded the vacuum left by Saddam Hussein's flight from power during the early
weeks of the campaign. Iraq's nationalist pride and, more immediately, their security and well
being were threatened by the chaos that spilled out into the streets. Iraq's economy, already
crippled by international sanctions following the invasion of Kuwait, worsened and made
survival a daily battle. Lack of opportunity led to an increased sense of frustration and
impotence, emotions that had been kept in check by Saddam's authoritarian fist. With his
removal came the freedom to express that frustration, if not the appropriate object for the
collective hostility. Instead of capitalizing on this moment by providing a stabilizing security
presence, U.S. forces misjudged the situation on the ground and failed to act. Looting and
vandalism left government buildings in shambles, and the police force without stations, weapons,
transportation or other basic tools necessary to enforce the law. More disconcerting to the local
populace than either terrorism or insurgency were the soaring crime rates that fed the chaos and
instability in the region, abetting the growing insurgency by compounding the problems U.S.
forces had to resolve before basic services and security could be assured.

Nearly two decades of war and sanctions have left the Iraqi family in a rather modern
predicament. The Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) estimates that there are
over 500,000 widows in Iraq.[27] According to a 2003 UNICEF report, over sixty percent of Iraqi
households in Basra are being led by women.[28] Widowed by the war or the economy as their

husbands travel abroad in search of better paying jobs, Iraqi women are ill-positioned to deal with the increasing lack of basic services and growing threat to personal safety. As Jennifer Turpin emphasizes, the loss is two-fold: "Losing husbands and sons may mean not only emotional loss but also lost economic support and social legitimacy."[29] Without their husband's financial support, women are forced to rely on other male family members or the tribe for assistance.

In the absence of that support, women are forced to find work in an unstable and often violent society. Suicide bombings and continued unrest compound the gender-specific threats and violence that women face. Yanar Mohammed, Director of the Baghdad-based Organization for Women's Freedom, notes that women face violence every day and often in direct sight of soldiers patrolling the streets.[30] In 2003, Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that conducts research and advocacy on human rights, reported that the government's inability to successfully address the rise in sexual violence and abduction against women and girls was due to the "U.S.-led coalition forces and civilian administration's failure to provide public security in Baghdad."[31] Facing an increased threat to their daughters' safety, many women elected to keep their daughters at home. A survey conducted by Iraq's Ministry of Education reflects this trend and shows a decreasing number of female students at the primary level. Conducted in the fall of 2004, the survey covered 2000 schools and educational establishments. Of the close to one million registered students, only 90,000 were females.[32]

Unfortunately, the continuing threat to women's safety on the streets of Baghdad feeds the agenda of those who would refuse women a place in the public sphere. As Irene Tinker observes, "generalized male violence against women, where women are victimized by men

outside of their own households, lends ideological and material support to the domestic mode of production by making women unsafe unless 'protected' by the presence of their household head."[33]   While this mode of production may be successful in a traditional, two parent household, Iraq's bloodied history makes a strictly domestic role impossible for thousands of women. Without the community's support, these women are forced to choose between abject poverty and its trappings of illiteracy, poor health and scarce prospects, or a marginalized and threatened existence wherein religious and cultural dictates serve to alienate them from the social support that they desperately need.

While the fusion of religion and politics remains a characteristic feature of the contemporary resurgence of Islam, it is its collision with war and western culture that creates such a challenging environment for women. The violence, destruction and poverty that most Iraqis face, fuel the belief that the restoration of Islam is the only way for Muslims to regain their rightful place in the world. Within this religious context, those who are disenfranchised or oppressed often find solidarity and a communal voice with which to assert their desires for power and a better future. Unfortunately, patriarchal society often precludes women from adding their voice to the others, leaving their future and place in society in the hands of men who may be threatened by their progress and its ramifications on their own power. Islamic extremists are quick to capitalize on male disenfranchisement and use their version of Islam to cast the discussion and advancement of women's rights as part of the problem. Yifat Susskind, communications coordinator for the international human- and women's-rights organization MADRE, sees a pattern writ large in Iraq: "often, the first salvo in a war for theocracy is a systematic attack on women . . . who represent or demand an alternative or competing vision for society."[34]

By connecting women's advancement to a western or "colonial" agenda, Islamic extremists are able to accomplish several objectives. First, they are able to recast women's advancement in society as un-Islamic and therefore part of a western plot meant to subjugate Islam. The legacy of a colonial past, Fatima Mernissi maintains, still influences how Muslim woman are perceived today:

> The fact that Western colonizers took over the paternalistic defense of the Muslim woman's lot characterized any changes in her condition as concessions to the colonizer. Since the external aspects of women's liberation, for example the neglect of the veil for western dress, were often emulations of Western women, women's liberation was readily identified as succumbing to foreign influences.[35]

The West's reappropriation of veiling as a symbol of inferiority and oppression plays right into the hands of those who wish to transform cultural differences and misunderstandings into the kindling for a religious war of nations.

Unfortunately, the propensity for Western discourse to connect women's rights to issues of culture feeds this perception. As Leila Ahmed observes, this assumption "has meant that an argument for women's rights is often perceived and represented by the opposing side as an argument about the innate merits of Islam and Arab culture comprehensively."[36] While it is not Arab culture, but the marginalization or inhumane treatment of women that draws Western censure, failure to adequately differentiate between the two issues in the past continues to undermine the U.S.'s ability to influence women's roles in Iraq today.

Second, they are able to maintain their own power by preventing women from effectively participating in the public sphere. The lack of security for women in the public sector fosters an environment in which religious extremists can harangue and assault women openly, without fear of reprisal from either the Iraqi police or U.S. forces. In light of such hostility, most women refuse to participate in local politics for fear of what might befall them or their families. For

those willing to risk ostracism and potential violence, there are few structures in place to support them as they navigate untested political waters. While United Nations (UN) Resolution 1325 directed the mainstreaming of gender in all aspects of reconstruction and political state building, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) failed to include a mandatory number of seats for women in the future National Assembly.[37] Sacrificed for political expediency, women's political representation seemed merely a bargaining chip, played by the U.S. to achieve other, more important political objectives. LtCol Carl Mundy III, commander of a Marine battalion in Iraq agrees that women's political empowerment was not a concern as he directed Phase IV operations in Al Qadisiya province: "My concern was not stepping where I shouldn't step, or dragging a woman in there that would anger the local men . . . Maybe once security has been established to a certain degree and most people are back to work, then you can start working around the edges at fair representation of both sexes."[38] These actions sent a clear message that the U.S. would not elevate women's rights to a point which might antagonize local religious leaders. Despite the omission of women from the 24 member constitutional drafting committee, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution does guarantee at least a quarter of the 275 seats in its new National Assembly to women.[39] While falling short of the recommended forty percent, these seats offer hope that women in Iraq will be able to secure an active and expanding role in shaping their own future.

Iraqi Women: Turning Threats into Opportunity

> I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost.[40]
>
> The Koran
> The Family of Imran

Despite the stumbles of the past, the U.S. and its allied partners have a unique opportunity to create an environment in Iraq where genuine change for women can occur. As

Elise Boulding observes in her article, <u>Warriors and Saints: Dilemmas in the History of Men,</u> <u>Women and War</u>, women, while seldom seen as visible leaders, remain at the core of reconstruction: "At the close of every war, destroyed communities have been rebuilt and much of the physical labor of rebuilding has been women's work . . . women have been called to a ceaseless reconstruction of the social infrastructure that provides the health, education and human services required for society not to fall apart."[41] In 1989 a UNICEF/UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) workshop was held to address the inclusion of Afghan women in reconstruction efforts. Planners emerged from the conference with several strategies for addressing reconstruction within a gender-based framework. From a Phase IV perspective, the following three strategies prove most useful in mapping a peace that involves women in all levels of society: (1) a focus on women's economic development in the context of their communities; (2) involvement of men in women's development projects; and (3) meeting women's needs through gender-based local and international networks.[42]

Community building and restoration is often the first step towards a larger societal transformation. As such, reconstruction efforts must focus on the community as the foundation upon which all future development will build. Its importance in women's lives is twofold: it helps women heal from past violence and trauma by rebuilding a framework of trust; and it empowers them to work together to shape a new existence from the ruins of the past. The World Bank has dedicated its efforts to improving the livelihoods of widows in Diwaniyah, south of Baghdad, by awarding a $50,000 grant to the Iraqi Widow's Organization (IWO).[43] The IWO is using the grant to create small businesses within the local community, and to provide women with the necessary training to sustain operations. By working together, women test their own capabilities and realize the strength that comes from being able to rely upon one another in the

pursuit of a common goal. "Development helps women when it draws them partway out of the domestic economy, providing them an income and an economic life independent of their household patriarch."[44]   The income generated from small business opportunities enables women to see themselves as valued contributors to their family's security and position within the community.

The advancement of women's rights in Iraq must also receive the support of tribal leaders if it is to make any lasting imprint on society. Organizations supporting women's causes must actively engage and enlist men of standing to their side in order to combat the perceived threat to patriarchal power and male identity. As advancing technologies and armies extend the reach of Western culture, Iraqi men are forced to revaluate their identity individually and collectively as a nation. By asserting their rights as men in a patriarchal culture, and as a nation under the hand of Allah, Arab-Islamic societies are able to maintain a sense of identity and cultural authenticity in the face of rapid modernization and globalization."[45]   Involving men in the creation of jobs and business opportunities for women, which in turn generates additional income for their families and prestige for their tribe, will help allay any fears of emasculation as a result of their success.

In addition, U.S. and Iraqi leaders must also seek support from the nation's religious leaders in order to prevent a backlash against recent women's reforms or erosion of their rights. Due to his influence and reputation as a moderate, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has played a key role in supporting women's right to vote and encouraging their turnout for elections. With Sistani's words, "Truly, women who go forth to the polling centers on election day are like Zaynab, who went forth to Karbala,"[46] appearing on thousands of campaign flyers during the 2005 elections, Iraqi women were reminded of the daughter of the first Shiite imam. Zaynab fought by her brother's side against an opposing caliph's forces and went on to become an

important leader of the Shiite community. "By invoking her name and example", Ahmed al-Rahim explains, "Sistani could appeal seamlessly and simultaneously to traditional piety, Shiite sacred history, and the idea of an active role for Muslim women as courageous leaders."[47] In the face of extremists like Muqtada al-Sadr, Sistani has succeeded in developing an apologetics of gender that provides Iraqis with an alternative vision of what it means to be a woman in Islam.

While community and tribal support can sustain women-led businesses at the local level, and religious leaders can promote women's rights as resolutely Muslim in character, it is the gender-based national and international networks that have the greatest potential for long term success in Iraq. By linking women with organizations and experts from other countries in the region, Iraqi women can access the direct experiences and training of women *like themselves*. As Nadje Al-Ali concluded from his research on women's organizations in Eqypt, women often feel more empowered by the experiences of non-Western women activists.[48] The ability to see oneself reflected in another's successful narrative flames the belief that change is possible.

Linking with other Muslim organizations can also generate additional momentum as the gains of one nation become the impetus, or precedent, for another. Iran has remained Islamic in character, yet it has also reconsidered certain post revolutionary policies concerning women's rights within the private and the public sphere. Although the Family Protection Act of 1967 was revoked after the revolution and replaced by legislation dating back to the 1930s, Islamist women activists were able to compel the government to revise the law and grant Iranian women additional rights.[49] Developments in Iran create a precedent within the Muslim world that "calls into question some of the prevailing assumptions about the relationship between Islam and women's status."[50]

Conclusion

The U.S.'s failure to resolve the pressing infrastructure and security concerns in Iraq, however, continues to limit the role of women today. While tradition and culture shape the way women conduct themselves in the private and public sphere, it does not preclude them from being actively involved in all levels of society. Religion remains a powerful influence within Iraq, but it is the combined power of the state, tribe and individual that influences the role and character of Islam in the political arena. The challenge remains how to develop a pluralistic society based on the recognition of a shared history and culture. How the U.S. and coalition forces engage political, religious and tribal leaders will undoubtedly shape women's rights within the months and years to come.

Ultimately, greater political participation by women could provide Iraq with the necessary stabilizing force to stave off the potentially disastrous division of Iraq into ethnic states. "Women have a shared stake in their economic and social development that impels them to transcend regional, ethnic, and religious divides."[51] It is their ability to relinquish past grievances and focus on a shared future that might eventually lead to their successful integration into all aspects of society.

Notes

1. Jone Johnson Lewis, "Adrienne Rich Quotes," <http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/quotes/a/qu_adriennerich.htm> (15 May 2008).

2. Mutmainaa, "Pearls of Wisdom," <http://www.geocities.com/mutmainaa/pearls.html> (16 May 2008).

3. Daniel G. Bates and Amal Rassam, Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 119.

4. Irene Tinker, Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126.

5. Leila Hessini, "Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity," in Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East, ed. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shira Balaghi (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 43.

6. Hessini, 42.

7. Tinker, 51.

8. Hessini, 43.

9. Bates, 236.

10. Bates, 236.

11. Bates, 237.

12. Bates, 241.

13. Hessini, 47.

14. Bates, 236.

15. Donna M. Bickford, "The Personal is Political: Origins of the Phrase," 7 February 1998, <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/pisp.html> (30 April 2008).

16. Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, "Iraq's Excluded Women," Foreign Policy no. 143, (2004): 42.

17. Noga Efrati, "Productive or Reproductive? The Roles of Iraqi Women During the Iraq-Iran War," Middle Eastern Studies vol. 35, iss. 2 (1999): 2.

18. Robert, Looney, "The Economics of Coping," <u>The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies</u> vol. 30, no. 3 (2005): 294.

19. Looney, 295.

20. Nadje Al-Ali, "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation," <u>Third World Quarterly</u> vol. 26, no. 4-5 (2005): 741.

21. Efrati, 4.

22. Efrati, 5.

23. Jennifer Turpin, "Many Faces: Women Confronting War." In <u>The Women and War Reader</u>, edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998): 8.

24. Fang 48.

25. Hunt, 42.

26. Fang, 49.

27. Fang, 51.

28. Al-Ali, 749.

29. Turpin, 8.

30. Al-Ali, 755.

31. Al-Ali, 756.

32. Looney, 296.

33. Tinker, 248.

34. Fang, 49.

35. Fatima Mernissi, <u>Beyond the Veil</u> (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing, 1975), vii.

36. Leila Ahmed, <u>Women and Gender in Islam</u> (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 167.

37. Hunt, 44.

38. Hunt 43.

39. Hunt 43.

40. Geraldine Brooks, <u>Nine Parts of Desire</u> (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1995), 167.

41. Susan R. McKay, "The Psychology of Societal Reconstruction and Peace: A Gendered Perspective." In <u>The Women and War Reader</u>, edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998): 353.

42. McKay, 358.

43. Arlene Elowe Macleod, <u>Accommodating Protest</u> (Chichester, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 176.

44. Tinker, 251.

45. Efrati, 7.

46. Ahmed H. Al-Rahim, "The Sistani Factor." <u>Journal of Democracy</u>, vol. 16, iss. 3, (2005): 1.

47. Al-Rahim, 1.

48. Al-Ali, 757.

49. Lisa Taraki, "The Role of Women." In <u>Understanding the Contemporary Middle East</u>, edited by Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 339.

50. Taraki, 339.

51. Hunt, 45.

Bibliography

Al-Ali, Nadje. "Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi Women between Dictatorship, War, Sanctions and Occupation." Third World Quarterly vol. 26, no. 4-5, 2005, 739-758.

Al-Rahim, Ahmed H. "The Sistani Factor." Journal of Democracy vol. 16, iss. 3, 2005, 4.

Bates, Daniel G., and Amal Rassam. Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Bickford, Donna M. "The Personal is Political: Origins of the Phrase." 7 February 1998 <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/pisp.html> (30 April 2008).

Brooks, Geraldine. Nine Parts of Desire. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1995.

Brown, Lucy, and David Romano. "Women in Post-Saddam Iraq: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?" NWSA Journal vol. 18, no. 3, 2006, 51-70.

Efrati, Noga. "Productive or Reproductive? The Roles of Iraqi Women During the Iraq-Iran War." Middle Eastern Studies vol. 35, iss. 2, 1999, 1-18.

---. "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq: The Women's Movement in the First Half of the Twentieth Century." British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies vol. 31, no. 2, 2004, 153-173.

Fang, Bay. "The Talibanization of Iraq." Ms. Spring 2007: 46-51.

Foote, Christopher, William Block, Keith Crane, and Simon Gray. "Economic Policy and Prospects in Iraq." The Journal of Economic Perspectives vol. 18, no. 3, 2004, 47-70.

Göçek, Fatma Müge, and Shira Balaghi. Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Hessini, Leila. "Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity." In Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East, edited by Fatma Müge Göçek and Shira Balaghi. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Hunt, Swanee, and Cristina Posa. "Iraq's Excluded Women." Foreign Policy no. 143, 2004, 40-45.

Lewis, Jone Johnson. "Adrienne Rich Quotes." <http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/quotes/a/qu_adriennerich.htm> (15 May 2008).

Looney, Robert. "The Economics of Coping." The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies vol. 30, no. 3, 2005, 285-304.

Macleod, Arlene Elowe. Accommodating Protest. Chichester, New York: Columbia University
     Press, 1991.

McKay, Susan R. "The Psychology of Societal Reconstruction and Peace: A Gendered
     Perspective." In The Women and War Reader, edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and
     Jennifer Turpin. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998.

Mernissi, Fatima. Beyond the Veil. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing, 1975.

Mutmainaa, "Pearls of Wisdom." < http://www.geocities.com/mutmainaa/pearls.html>
     (16 May 2008).

Prividera, Laura C, and John W. Howard III. "Masculinity, Whiteness, and the Warrior Hero:
     Perpetuating the Strategic Rhetoric of U.S. Nationalism and the Marginalization of
     Women." Women and Language vol. 29, iss. 2, 2006, 9.

Taraki, Lisa. "The Role of Women." In Understanding the Contemporary Middle East, edited
     by Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner
     Publishers, 2004.

Tinker, Irene. Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development. New York, New York:
     Oxford University Press, 1990.

Turpin, Jennifer. "Many Faces: Women Confronting War." In The Women and War Reader,
     edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin. New York, NY: New York
     University Press, 1998.

Zuckerman, Elaine, and Marcia Greenberg. "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict
     Reconstruction: An Analytical Framework for Policymakers." Gender and
     Development vol. 12, no. 3, 2004, 70-82.