

Nadje Sadig Al-Ali. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London: Zed Books, 2007. Pp. 292. Paper \$24.95.

Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, Professor of Gender Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, examines Iraqi history from 1948 through 2006 based on interviews with over 180 Iraqi women who now live abroad. Al-Ali uncovers women's political agency that has often been left out of the broader narrative of modern Iraqi history. She explains that until recently, women and men in Iraq were classified more by class, regional, professional, and political identity rather than by their religion. She also argues that the Iraqi populace would have been better able to change their own society if the U.S. had not invaded their country.

The women's memories span different economic and political eras, including the revolution that transformed Iraq from a monarchy to a republic (1950s-1960s), the reign of the Ba'ath regime (1968-2003), the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), the economic sanctions (1990-2003), Gulf War (1990-91), and the recent U.S.-led occupation (2003-2006). The majority of interviewees lived in Baghdad, were educated and middle class. The women were active across the political spectrum, ranging from communist political organizations working for workers and women's rights, to individuals lobbying in Washington D.C. for U.S. intervention. Women participated in sit-ins, protests, strikes, humanitarian and welfare assistance, as well as underground political work. In addition to the interviews, Al-Ali used a variety of secondary, governmental, humanitarian, and media sources. She also shared her own family's experience of the many struggles over the past several decades in Iraq, as well as her personal passion for peace and justice.

The women Al-Ali interviewed had mixed views about the U.S. invasions of Iraq. Most were very skeptic of American intentions and believed that oil and geo-political strategy motivated them. On the other hand, some of the women wanted U.S. intervention, even prayed for it, and had faith that the U.S. and British soldiers would bring democracy. Mona N. believed the latter. She hated Saddam's regime so much that she believed that the Bush doctrine would bring democracy, human rights and freedom, and she even lobbied in the U.S. for the war in 2003. Mona as well as others who managed to escape Iraq shortly after the Gulf War had very different views compared to the Iraqi women who were still living in Iraq and witnessed first hand the continued atrocities that resulted from the U.S.-led war. Suad G. and her daughter Amal expressed their disgust, fear, and anger about the war. Suad points out that if Americans had really wanted to oust Saddam they could have assassinated him; she believes that the U.S. just wanted to take Iraqi oil. Most of the women Al-Ali interviewed concurred that the wars and sanctions were detrimental to women's health and participation in public life and contributed to the growing economic dependence of women when many lost their jobs and livelihoods. Nuha, an Iraqi female painter who died in 2004 due to exposure to uranium, explained how sanctions and wars led many families to stock up on food that they could not obtain after U.S. occupation and many had to eat everything quickly due to lack of electricity for refrigeration.

This book offers a unique understanding of Iraqi women and their experiences at a time when great chaos and wars have strained the voices of all, and in particular Iraqi women. Despite the absence of lower class women's voices, Al-Ali has added to the narratives of Iraqi history. Al-Ali hopes to continue to help the Iraqi women's voices be heard and plans to interview more poor women and share their stories in the future. Individuals interested in the history of the Middle East, Iraq, and the U.S. at war will gain a greater understanding of the region, women, and its people by reading her important work.

Anitra Wetzel
