

## Women Muslim Hardship after Al-Anbar Province War of Iraq

## Kesengsaraan Wanita Muslim selepas Perang Wilayah Al-Anbar Iraq

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the situation and experiences of women during a civil war between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in the region of Al Anbar, Iraq in 2013. The impact of the war had caused disruptions in terms of public order, properties and many people were killed. Although the women did not participate directly in the war, they suffered the consequences of the war. The present study was undertaken to investigate on how women attempted to cope with the situation during the war. The study was conducted based on qualitative approach using an in-depth interview method to obtain both primary and secondary data. A total of 25 informants were selected for the study. All informants had become widows as their husbands were killed during the war which resulted in destruction, murder, displacement, social circumstances and unstable political situations. The findings showed that the civil war had rendered women in Al-Anbar as widows. Women lost their honor, children and relatives as a result of immigration diseases in their attempts to escape the war. In conclusion, there was a need for the Sunni and Shiite Muslims to seriously consider the impact of war on women that required the Sunni and Shiite Muslims to put aside their respective ideological differences and to find a compromising and lasting peace in the province of Al-Anbar. In the final analysis, nobody accepts humiliation caused to women who suffered more than just killings, migration and random bombing.*

*Keywords: Iraq; Women; Humiliation; Suffering; Widows; Migration; Qualitative approach; lasting peace*

## ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini membincangkan situasi dan pengalaman wanita semasa perang saudara antara Muslim Sunni dan Syiah di wilayah Al Anbar, Iraq pada tahun 2013. Impak perang telah menyebabkan gangguan dari segi ketenteraman awam, harta benda dan banyak orang terbunuh. Walaupun wanita tidak terlibat secara langsung dalam perang, mereka mengalami akibat perang. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menyoal bagaimana wanita cuba mengatasi keadaan semasa peperangan. Kajian ini dijalankan berdasarkan pendekatan kualitatif menggunakan kaedah wawancara mendalam untuk mendapatkan data primer dan sekunder. Sejumlah 25 orang pemberi maklumat dipilih untuk kajian ini. Semua pemberi maklumat telah menjadi janda sebagai suami mereka dibunuh semasa perang yang mengakibatkan kemusnahan, pembunuhan, perpindahan, keadaan sosial dan keadaan politik yang tidak stabil. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa perang saudara telah menjadikan wanita di Al-Anbar sebagai janda. Wanita kehilangan kehormatannya, anak-anak dan saudara mara akibat penyakit imigrasi dalam percubaan mereka untuk melepaskan diri dari perang. Kesimpulannya, terdapat keperluan bagi umat Islam Sunni dan Syiah untuk mempertimbangkan serius kesan perang terhadap wanita yang mengharuskan kaum Sunni dan Syiah untuk menyetujui perbezaan ideologi mereka masing-masing dan untuk mencari keamanan yang berkompromi dan berkekalan di wilayah Al- Anbar. Dalam analisis akhir, tiada siapa yang menerima penghinaan yang disebabkan oleh wanita yang mengalami lebih daripada sekadar pembunuhan, penghijrahan dan pengeboman secara rawak.*

*Kata kunci: Iraq; wanita; penghinaan; penderitaan; janda; Migrasi; pendekatan kualitatif; keamanan yang berkekalan*

## INTRODUCTION

The present study attempts at understanding the obstacles and complications faced by woman after a civil war which broke out in 2013 in Al-Anbar province of Iraq. The province is Iraq's largest and western most part of the country. It comprises 32 percent of the country's total land

mass of nearly 137,810 km<sup>2</sup>, almost twice the size of Peninsular Malaysia and slightly larger than Greece. Geographically, it is isolated from the rest of Iraq, but is an easy access to and from Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. The Euphrates River, Lake Habbaniyah, and the artificially created Lake Qadisiyah are among the most significant geographical features of the country. Ninety five percent of the population

live within 5 miles (8.0 km) of the Euphrates (Lowry & Gerrard 2006). According to Ali (2013), the estimated the population of Al-Anbar was about 1.5 million with more than two-third living in the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. With a population of over 95 percent Sunni, many of whom were from the Dulaimi Tribe, Anbar is the only Iraq's province without a significant Shia or Kurdish populations. At the time of the first invasion, Fallujah was known as a religious enclave being hostile towards outsiders, while Ramadi, the provincial capital, was more secular. The Al-Anbar province was considered a complex environment because of the existence of the different clans that have different orientations, beliefs and affiliations to different parties (Martin & Tirman 2009). These orientations, beliefs and affiliations started during the time of American occupation of Iraq and continued to be with the government agencies formed by the American forces. Thus, this has created numerous problems on the part of people who wished to live peacefully. Among the problems was the fact that women were highly impacted during the Al-Anbar war. The objective of the present study was to investigate the obstacles that women faced after the civil war. Outside the cities, the ancient tribal system ran by the Sheikhs held considerable influence (Davie & Mazuy 2010). Thus, the civilians in Al-Anbar continued to be the victims of the civil between the militias and government's army after the withdrawal of the Americans. The province was also not spared from the brutal rampage of ISIS / ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Shams / the Levant) which began in 2014. Fearon & Laitin (2003) said the end of the Cold War and that the root cause of many or most of these have been ethnic and religious antagonisms. So show that the current prevalence of internal war is mainly the result of a steady accumulation of protracted conflicts since the 1950s and 1960s rather than a sudden change associated with a new, post-Cold War international system. Also found that after controlling for per capita income, more ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil violence in this period. So they argue for understanding civil war in this period in terms of insurgency or rural guerrilla warfare, a particular form of military practice that can be harnessed to diverse political agendas.

McKenzie et al. (2015) in his argument on the Syrian conflict cited that the wars were correlated with ideological and political backgrounds. These were frequently muffled by gratuitous violence

leading to population displacement, but the importance of ideology should not be diminished notwithstanding. Turner (2010) rightly indicated that the 'New wars' theories contributed to our understanding of civil wars by focusing our attention on the multi-dimensional concept of comprehensive security with its social, economic, political and human elements. On the other hand, South, Lutz, & Baumer (2005) in their argument cited that family relocation impacted on children's growth, development, school functions and behavior. However, Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck & Nessim (1993) said, both child dysfunction and family relocation were independently associated with multiple socio-demographic characteristics such as poverty, race and family structure. Frequent relocation was associated with higher rates of all measures of child dysfunction: 23% of children who moved frequently had repeated a grade compared to 12% children who never or infrequently moved. Eighteen percent of children who moved frequently had four or more behavioral problems versus 7% of children who never or infrequently moved. Use of logistic regression to control for potential confounding covariates had demonstrated that children who moved frequently were 77% more likely to be reported to have four or more behavioral problems (odds ratio, 1.77; 95% confidence interval, 1.37 to 2.29) and were 35% more likely to have failed a grade (odds ratio, 1.35; 95% confidence interval, 1.06 to 1.72), but no more likely to have had delays in growth or development or a learning disorder. After adjusting for other covariates, frequent family relocation was also associated with an increased risk of children failing a grade in school and four or more frequently occurring behavioral problems. American et al (2003) showed that the current prevalence of internal war was mainly the result of a steady accumulation of protracted conflicts since the 1950s and 1960s rather than a sudden change associated with a new, post-Cold War international system. They also found that after controlling per capita incomes and growth rates, more ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil war during this period. They argued that for understanding civil war in this period in terms of insurgency or rural guerrilla warfare, a particular form of military practice could be harnessed to diverse political agendas, including but not limited to ethnic nationalism. The factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious

characteristics but rather their conditions that favor insurgency. These include the country's poverty and slow growth, which favor rebel recruitment and mark financially and bureaucratically weak states, rough terrain, and large populations. Biddle & Long (2012) in his argument on Civil War Intervention and the Problem of Iraq, cited in particular, that links between civil war rebel groups and the government of neighboring states significantly increased the risk that the neighboring states will intervene by sending troops across the border, as do material power advantages for potential interveners and high levels of combat intensity in civil war. Not all factors noted in either the scholarly literature or the policy debate are of comparable importance, however in particular, neither alliance links, Middle Eastern political culture, nor refugee flows had significant effects. However, they implied that the unique features of Iraq and its neighbors could have the opposite effect of increasing, not decreasing, the risk of intervention relative to others. Iraq presents an unusually interconnected ethno-sectarian conflict in a neighborhood with large number of potential interveners who share the Sunni majority populations and/or regimes of Iraq's Sunni insurgency. The neighbors are relatively weak now, and so is Iraq, and the region ongoing arms race stands to increase those neighbors' material capacity to intervene over time. Iraq is also a state with a civil war that reached very high average intensity. These factors are all strongly linked with an elevated risk of intervention. The findings above show no reason to expect that anything's unique to the Middle East region per se should imply any unusual freedom from danger: whereas Africa, for example, is an especially intervention – prone region, the Middle East is not significantly different from the rest of world. However of any systematic consideration of the range of evidence and experience that empirical scholarship can be considered. Knowledge is important in its own right. But where the stakes in public decision-making are as grave as those in war and peace, opportunities to apply knowledge to inform public debate can be-end should be-exploited more often.

Al-Wattar, Hussein, & Hussein (2011) focused on women's narratives of sport and war in Iraq. Women has always been among the first to feel the impact of conflict. A high percentage of widows and forced/early marriage represents some of biggest problems, divorce and unequal job opportunities, and limited involvement in politics. Hakala, (2013)

focused on Iraq's deadly spiral toward a civil war. Said, in recent months sectarian violence in Iraq has escalated worryingly. Therefore, more than 6 400 people have been killed across the country this year, half of them in the last three months. Also the Shia-dominated central government has failed to address the grievances of the Sunni minority and has responded to public protests with a heavy hand, leading militant Sunni groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to gain ground. Based on the previous studies, Iraq country faced the civil war and that civil war created obstacles and suffering to people. Women have always been among the first to feel the impact of conflict. The main objective of the study was to investigate the obstacles that women faced in Al-Anbar province during the civil war that occurred.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Sampling procedure:** The informants in this study were chosen in an interview and in choosing them, a method of simple random sampling was employed. This study was conducted in Al-Anbar province which is located in Ramadi. The sample was made up of 25 interviewee and all of them were living in the Anbar province. The sample size was chosen based on the saturation of data gathered from the informants. The interviewees were between 18 and 50 years old. Age was demarcated to 18 to 50 in order to represent the adult population in Anbar who were living in Anbar City. The Al-Anbar province was selected for the female informants of the Anbar population. The sampling was also based on their knowledge, understanding, and recognition of women's suffering while being of the same race. According to Moore and McCabe (1990), random sampling in a qualitative research eliminates bias by giving all individuals equal chance of being chosen. Sampling in the present study was representative of the population.

## DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the informants. The interviews were conducted by following interview guidelines. Questions asked have been prepared and considered with the objective of understanding the obstacles of civil war on woman. Interview is a basic method of data collection in most qualitative studies. The data were collected for a period of 2 months during the winter

of 2015 (January and February). Each interview lasted for forty five minutes to one and a half hour. All interviews were in written format. Interviews were conducted in Arabic language. Arabic is widely spoken in Iraq and is considered a dialect of Arabic called Iraqi.

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

There were six chains of activities carried out during the data processing. They were as follows: (1) Interviews with each respondent, copied and translated into transcript format, (2) Before the transcripts were written or produced, the researchers listened to the interviews that had been recorded at least twice to ensure no interviews were omitted or neglected, (3) As soon as the transcription process was completed, each transcript or text was later reviewed or given reconsideration and rearranged to reflect a brief description of impacted Anbar woman, (4) the data were later saved in files using different names, (5) A few jargons in Arabic language used by the Anbar community in their daily lives when making descriptions or narratives about their own identity were maintained in original words, and finally (6) Managing the data through categorization process. In the process, the researcher analyzed the results into a more structured and organized style. This was in line with the statement given by Strauss & Corbin (2008) that coding is the method and process through which data are fragmented, conceptualized and then reintegrated into theory development.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There was a general agreement among informants in the study that for better understanding of the issue, there was a need to focus on hardship and suffering of a civil war and should be described like a story. Attention should be given to the concept of the issue. Most participants gave their views and wanted to tie their ideas to the obstacles and suffering of women in Al-Anbar. Many declared that they had not seen women being impacted in past wars more than this like immigration, missed homes, adultery etc.

The civil wars in Al-Anbar had killed thousands of people and displaced millions of homes. Clashes between the army (Shiite) and militia (Sunni) often erupted due disagreement in political policies, religious issues and conflicts between tribal clans. Iraqi women have suffered in Anbar Province

since the beginning of the sectarian war in Iraq. Women have been facing many difficulties and obstacles which hardly confined to one subject. The women have sensitivity and own important positions or status in the society. Humiliation had caused the women to suffer more than others since the beginning of the war with killings, migration and random bombing. As a result, women had to migrate to other places or cities along with their babies, sons and daughters. Due to rarity of cars and other means of transportations, women had to travel by means of vehicles that carry animals like cattle. Women had to endure severe cold weather with their children with eyes full of tears leaving their homes and cities far from their relatives and neighbours. The sufferings continued, and women faced obstacles at checkpoints that revealed the identity for identification purposes. The men were arrested and randomly gunned down with mortars or aerial bombardment. The women also encountered other difficulties such as long journeys that they had to go through to arrive their destinations since main roads were generally blocked. A two-hour journey to get to a particular place became 18 hours since cars had to pass through deserts. There were other obstacles faced by women especially during sieges by militants that often lasted for five months. This prevented the entry of food and water, hence disabling women to feed their babies.

Women also suffered at the destinations where they lived after migration. They did not live in apartments or houses, but at schools or buildings or even tents built outside the city centers. The situation was worse than this as many of them lived in buses and schools where each family was allocated almost four meters in length and three meters in width. Many of them were also subjected to harm by other immoral people that led to loss of honor for many women. It also became easier to infringe women, particularly those whose husbands were killed or arrested during the war. Women lived at the mercy and conscience of the people in the neighbourhood by seeking their support or aid for such things as food, fuel, heaters, gas, electricity and others.

The obstacles faced by Iraqi women who migrated to another city, outside Anbar were even more severe. They lived in tents on the outskirts of the province of Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah and Arbil in in the Kurdistan region, and many of them died because of the cold and oppression. According to the informants, many of the women were also raped by the Kurds and other migrants who came from



different cities or provinces in Iraq. For instance, women whose husbands or brothers had died in such war and who only had girls were forced to make their daughters work in order to live rather than die of hunger. Therefore, many girls became street-sellers who hanged out the streets to sell tissues or worked in coffee shops in Sulaymaniyah and Arbil. They became easy victims of sexual harassment.

Generally, women have become widowed and faced difficulties and obstacles. With the loss of husbands, woman faced and suffered more than others since the start of this war, killings, migration and random bombing. The suffering occurred during the displacement and bombing of houses by missiles. As a result, women had to migrate to other places or cities along with their babies, sons and daughters.

### CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper discusses the difficulties women in Al-Anbar faced during the civil war between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The study also analyzed the outcomes of these obstacles. It concludes that woman faced countless other difficulties, each being different and widespread. The women were impacted by aircraft bombings, mortar falls, missing homes, valuables and honor. In the informants' viewpoint, woman in Anbar Province had suffered since the beginning of the sectarian war in Iraq. In their opinion, the majority of woman had endured the most painful experience during the civil war. Woman in Anbar is considered as extremely sensitive as a result of constant humiliation, killings, migration and random bombing. The suffering started at the start of displacement and bombing of houses by missiles, and as a result, they had to migrate to other places or cities along with their babies, sons and daughters. They faced obstacles when cars and transportation were rare, or had to sit and go vehicles which normally carry animals like cattle. They had to stay in severe cold weather with their children with eyes full of tears leaving their homes and cities or distanced from relatives and neighbours. The sufferings continued, one after another at checkpoints that securitized identity and arrest of men at random with shotguns, mortars and aerial bombardment. Woman always feel depressed, in darkness, sorrowful, anger, psychological and social pressure. However, woman of Al-Anbar have strong faith and think well of Allah. Data show that woman also has issues such as adultery and

loss of honor. The wars had caused massive death toll, destruction of the city, loss of properties and possessions and disruption of lives for millions of people living in the region. In the meantime, the state of Anbar began to witness a more complex political environment due to the existence of the various clans that have different orientations and affiliations to different political parties.

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