

## CHAPTER ONE

# Eight Women, One War

Nimo, Maha, Safah, Shatha, Emma, Danielle, Kim, and Charlene. Four Iraqi women, four American women. I have never met any of these women. But I feel as though I have been living with them for the past six years. They have changed my mind. My mind slips into a particular mood when I think of each of these women. My thoughts orient themselves differently when I give them over to any one of them, while walking to the subway, or standing in line at the post office. Nimo takes me to a small beauty salon where women chat easily, the lights flicker and the water sputters out of the faucet; Kim makes me feel what it is like to be awoken in the middle of the night by a phone call from an anxious military wife. The sputtering water, the night-time phone call—these are among women’s lived realities during the long Iraq War.

Nimo, Maha, Safah, Shatha, Emma, Danielle, Kim, and Charlene. I am deeply indebted to each one of them. They have taught me anew that there are always fresh questions to ask about what it takes to wage wars—about all the efforts to manipulate disparate ideas about femininity, about the attempts to mobilize particular groups of women, about the pressures on certain women to remain loyal and silent. There are more efforts to control women and to squeeze standards for femininity and manliness into narrow

molds than most war wagers will admit. There are far more efforts than most analysts care to acknowledge.

Together, these eight women also have taught me that in the midst of warfare the politics of marriage, the politics of femininities, the genderings of racial and ethnic identities, and the workings of misogyny each continue. Warfare does not stop the gendered clock. Sometimes, it sets the hands of the clock back.

These eight women have taught me, too, to be a lot more curious about what skills and resources it takes for a woman to survive a war: persuading an uncle to take you and your children into his small apartment after militiamen have murdered your husband and destroyed your home; having workmates who will cover for you when you have to travel across the country to your wounded son's bedside; mustering the gumption to confront the strangers who have occupied your house; creating new goals for yourself after losing an arm; returning to school after seeing your aunt shot point-blank.

Nimo, Maha, Safah, Shatha, Emma, Danielle, Kim, and Charlene. I don't think any of these eight women ever have met, though perhaps in prewar days Maha walked by Nimo's Baghdad beauty salon or Kim saw Danielle on ESPN as she smoothly outmaneuvered other players on the basketball court.

The Iraq War started when the U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003 and then was fought on many fronts for months and years afterward. We can draw new understandings of warfare and wartimes by paying close attention to these eight women without turning any one of them into merely the iconic "working woman," "wife," "widow," "mother," or "woman soldier." Nor do we need to succumb to the temptation to treat each of these eight women as so distinctive in her experiences and personality that she stands alone, outside history. To be curious about a particular woman's experiences and ideas, to respect her individuality, is not to say that she is unable to shed light on larger canvases of warfare and wartime.

This double-claim—that each of these eight women is neither unique nor universal—is easier to assert, of course, than it is to demonstrate. Readers, I think, will see me tussling here with the dynamic relationship between

generality and particularity as I try to understand each woman's experience for its own sake, while simultaneously seeking to tease out from her life the wider implications of those experiences.

My own inclination is toward comparison and generalization, to delve into one to shed light on the other, to use the particular to reveal the general. That's the teacher in me. At the same time, though, more perhaps than in any of my previous writings, I have worried about doing justice to each woman individually. Emma is more than a Latina, more than an American mother of a teenage son. Safah is more than an Iraqi teenage girl, more than a massacre survivor. I realize now that I scarcely know how much more.

As the scores of notes in the following chapters will attest, there have been dozens of books, reports, and articles about Iraqi women's and American women's experiences of the Iraq War. I have learned from them all. What I am suggesting in this modest book is that we have something important to discover by thinking of Iraqi and American women together—not because they have known each other (though a few have), not because they have made common alliance (though some have), but, rather, because thinking about women on several “sides” in the same war might make starkly visible how wars and their prolonged aftermaths depend both on particular ideas about and practices of femininity and masculinity, and on women in warring states *not* discovering their connections with one another.

By taking each of these eight women seriously and exploring their varied wartime experiences together, I have been led toward two new fundamental understandings about war. First, these eight women, considered together, have underscored for me how every war takes place—is waged, is coped with, is assessed—at a particular moment in ongoing gendered histories, national gendered histories, and international gendered history. Shatha, for instance, competed for a seat in the wartime Iraqi parliament at a time when women's rights activists internationally were successfully pressing governments to establish legislative quotas for women. Danielle enlisted in the U.S. Army at a time in U.S. history when government officials no longer could enjoy the masculinized luxury of filling its ranks with male conscripts. That is, the early 2000s activists' push for establishing parliamentary quotas for

women helped shape the Iraq War. So did U.S. male war strategists' reluctant postconscription acceptance of women recruits.

In military academies, civilian classrooms, and on blogs and editorial pages all over the world, commentators compare wars—the Vietnam War with the Chechen War, the Yugoslav War with the Congo War. So what is new here is not that wartime observers chart similarities and differences between wars. Rather, what paying close attention to these eight women newly reveals is that any given war takes place not simply at a particular moment in the history of weapons technology (was the stirrup invented yet? Which side had access to remote-controlled drones?). Nor has any given war taken place just at a particular moment in the evolution of the nation-state (did the warring state have effective tax collectors? Could the state's war strategists call on a widely felt national identity strong enough to trump communal loyalties?). Not even awareness of the evolution of political economies is sufficient (would Western state elites have fought over Iraq if petroleum-dependent industrialization had not been then in full bloom?).

Those conventional historicized investigations alone, I've found, are not enough to make adequate sense of a given war or to compare wars reliably. Any war takes place at a particular moment in the history of gender—that is, in the history of women's organizing, in the history of women's relationships to the state, in the history of contested masculinities, in the history of patriarchy's rationalization and reach. The Iraq War is better understood if we ask how its occurring at a distinctive point in the national and international histories of women and of patriarchy has shaped its causes, its winding course, and its aftermath.

Taking on board this deeper understanding of the historicity of warfare would alter the required reading lists at West Point and Sandhurst, but also at Oxford, Berkeley, and Tokyo University. Professors teaching courses on military history and national security doctrines would have to start assigning books on the history of marriage. They would have to require their students to delve into historicized investigations of wartime prostitution. They themselves—as historians and analysts of war and national security—would have to become familiar with the rich primary sources on women's move-

ments in 1890s Russia, 1910s Britain, 1920s Korea, 1930s Japan, 1960s Iran, 1970s United States, 1980s Yugoslavia, 1980s Iraq, 1990s Rwanda, 2000s Congo, and 2000s Pakistan.

A second new idea started to take shape as I spent more and more time in my head with Nimo, Maha, Safah, Shatha, Emma, Danielle, Kim, and Charlene. I gradually began to see war's distinct phases, gendered phases. The politics of any war is unlikely to be the same at its start, its middle, and its end. Think of 1940 Britain compared with 1942 and 1945 Britain. Furthermore, the differences between any war's own time periods are likely to be marked by distinctly different gender dynamics and preoccupations. Feminist historians of World Wars I and II have discovered this. Feminist historians of the Crimean, Boer, and Iran-Iraq wars have confirmed this. The politics of marriage, of property, of sexuality, of women's paid work, of parenting—each changed in the midst of each war.

Each of those gendered political changes altered the dynamics of war—who were the key players, what were their resources and their rationalizations. We ignore the wartime transformations of marriage politics at our own analytical risk.

Gendered wartime phases marked the Iraq War as well. For instance, Iraqi women's beauty salons did not become the target of bomb-throwing militiamen at the outset of the Iraq War. They were set afire in its second gendered phase, when some men organized into militarized groups had convinced themselves that a certain practice of feminized beauty was subverting the country's wartime civic order. Similarly, Charlene's maternal work to heal a shattered young American male veteran didn't attract much congressional attention until later in the Iraq War, when her government's inadequate care of returning soldiers became the focus of press reports.

This is not to argue that all wars proceed lockstep through identical gendered phases. The gendered phases of the Iraq War may be quite different than those of, say, the 1990s Yugoslav wars or World War I. In fact, the gendered wartime and postwar phases may turn out to be quite different in their timing and their patterns in the several societies engaged in the *same* war. Thus while feminized beauty was politicized in 2005 Iraq and the United

States, the wartime politics of beauty in both countries were not identical. Yet these eight women have taught me to be alert to gendered phases within any war, thus to stay focused month by month, year by year to often subtle changes: which masculinities were privileged early in the war versus two years later; which women became the objects of political elites' anxiety as the death rates rose, which as they fell; what issues were prioritized by politically engaged women initially, though later strategically downgraded. Paying attention to these eight particular women over time throughout this one war has taught me to cultivate a long attention span, to eschew analytical laziness, to avoid referring simplistically to "the war."

I began to notice each of these eight women one by one during the early phase of the Iraq War. At that point, in 2003 and 2004, I was not intent upon collecting eight women's wartime stories. I was just seeking to gain a more subtle understanding of this war by listening to the voices of particular women. This is an enterprise feminists have taught us is always analytically rewarding.

I was freshly reminded of this reward when, in the later phases of the Iraq War, I began reading a new book published by the feminists of the anti-militarism group Women in Black, Belgrade. To help readers comprehend not only the war at its outset and at its peak, but also the war in its ongoing aftermath, the editors had decided to present women's own firsthand accounts of the 1990s war that tore apart the former Yugoslavia. They called their book *Women's Side of War*.<sup>1</sup> The Belgrade Women in Black editors were committed to letting women speak for themselves about what they each did in this war, what the war did to them, and how, a decade later, they continued to think about both. Readers can hear one hundred and ten women's voices between this book's covers. Much of what they say is surprising, a lot of it is discomfiting. Some women never before had spoken about these experiences. Other women had been writing since the war began but continued to reassess their earlier thoughts. Perhaps one day Iraqi and American (and British, Georgian, Korean, Fijian, Spanish, Polish, and Australian) feminist activist editors will collect in one place diverse women's voices telling of their experiences in the Iraq War.

To hope for such an ambitious volume of women's firsthand recollections is not to say that there is no place for analysis. Instead, what feminists from many countries have taught us is that reflective thinking requires a perpetual return to women's own voices. That is what some thoughtful journalists offered us in the midst of the Iraq War.

The journalists whose profiles of individual Iraqi and American women I have relied upon here did not select women who were making wartime headlines. Lynndie England, Jessica Lynch, and Condoleezza Rice are not here. Nor did these innovative journalists treat the women they featured as mere symbols or abstractions or widgets. Each woman was portrayed with her own voice, her own neighbors, relatives, and allies, with her own resources, calculations, and worries. At this time in American media history, when money-strapped newspapers are closing their overseas bureaus and some cities' daily papers are disappearing altogether, I found myself more indebted than ever to the women and men working as professional journalists—and to those editors who provided them with the discretion, resources, and time to do this sort of painstaking reporting.

I am not sanguine about the press. Its flaws are multiple and run deep: coziness with governmental sources, nervousness about advertisers' sensibilities, vulnerability to publishers' ideological interventions, and preoccupation with corporate profits. I value commentators. I read and listen to a lot of them, benefiting from their insights. Yet their commentaries necessarily rely on the expanded, not shrunken, existence of careful, detailed, ethical, energetic, and sometimes risky reporting done by on-the-ground journalists. Sabrina Tavernise's decision to treat a small Baghdad beauty parlor as a site for gathering wartime news, Damien Cave's decision to pay attention to a Texas high school in order to reveal how a government acquires its soldiers—these journalistic decisions (and their editors' support for these decisions) make it possible for citizens to begin to make sense of the gendered politics of wars.

As will become obvious in the chapters that follow, however, we acquire the means for crafting a full and nuanced analysis of any war when we place the highest quality journalism in an enriched context that research-

ers can provide. Thus the work of researchers within the World Health Organization, Oxfam, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Refugees International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, Small Arms Survey, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, many of them in partnership with Iraqi researchers, has clarified the patterns, the preconditions, and consequences to which the journalists' accounts first gave substance.

Distinctive to the Iraq War (and the contemporaneous conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Congo, Sudan, Sri Lanka, and Somalia) is the prominence of researchers trained in gendered analysis who are working inside these organizations. Employing these gender analytical skills made their reports on the Iraq War more realistic and thus more useful. Feminist-informed gender analysis is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Consequently, we know a lot more about the interactions in this war, for instance, between men as refugees, women as refugees, men in relief agencies, and women in relief agencies than we did about those crucial relationships during World War II or the Pakistan-Bangladesh War.

Wartime research also has its own gendered history. That gendered history of research—what is deemed worth asking, what is never asked, who is considered worth interviewing, who is considered too marginal to interview—shapes how we see any war; it determines what lessons we take away from any war. Why did it take until the 1990s for the Japanese Imperial government's 1930s–40s program of sex slavery to come to light? Why did the U.S. occupation authorities' racialized dating policies in postwar Germany only surface fifty years later? The answer in part is that in each instance powerful state actors had a stake in suppressing knowledge about these policies. But these silences also reflect the absence of systematic gender analysis in the tool kits of the hundreds of researchers who investigated, allegedly, every conceivable dimension of World War II. The full dimensions and multiple processes of the Iraq War are far more exposed because this war broke out when gender analysis was having an impact on at least some researchers' curiosities. We all are the beneficiaries of that gendered exposure.

Individual academic scholars often lack the funds, the protection, and the



staffs to conduct long-term research in violence-riddled war zones. They are excluded, intimidated, and poor. Yet, against formidable odds, some do. I have tried to make their work visible in the notes at the end of this book. Including citations and bibliographies is not merely an academic ritual. It can help readers appreciate all the physical and mental work done by other investigators that has made this small book possible. These scholars' work has been invaluable in revealing the wartime patterns of violence, silence, displacement, strategizing, and mobilization that often have limited, but occasionally have widened each of these eight women's outlook and actions.

Other university-based scholars have conducted careful research not during the shooting and killing, but just before a society plunges into armed conflict. The Iraq War began when Iraqis were still trying to put their lives together in the decade-long aftermath of the 1990–91 Gulf War. For Americans, by contrast, the Iraq War began when their country already was at war in Afghanistan. Scholars' work on prewar gender dynamics is essential to our understanding of the gendered processes of wartime because no armed conflict erupts on a blank slate. Armed conflict occurs among people who already have been—or have not been—encouraging girls to stay in school. War occurs among people who already have been—or have not been—electing women to the post of commander in chief. A war occurs among people who already have been—or have not been—ensuring that divorced women don't descend into poverty, among people who already have—or have not—held accountable the male perpetrators of “peacetime” sexual violence. These prewar (or “between-wars”) prior gendered beliefs, structures, and practices will have major impacts not only on how the given war will be justified, but on how that war will be waged and on how it will be remembered by the next generation.

Once again, the Iraq War occurred when academic scholarship—the questions asked, the methodologies employed—was more informed by explicitly feminist intellectual skills and feminist intellectual exchanges than ever before in history. During the years of the Iraq War there were scholars earning doctorates in women's studies in Ireland, Japan, Israel, Canada, and the United States. New master's degree programs in women's

and gender studies were being launched in a dozen countries around the world. Many of these young scholars chose as their theses topics questions about the gender dynamics of specific wars.

The Iraq War was being waged when universities were appointing feminist-informed scholars to academic posts in Namibia, South Africa, Barbados, Mexico, Chile, Hungary, Serbia, Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, and scores of other countries. These faculty members were being permitted to design new courses for students that explored the militarizations of femininities and masculinities. The National Women's Studies Association was convening large conferences every year in wartime United States. The International Congress of Women's Studies drew hundreds of feminist scholars to Seoul and then Madrid in the midst of the Iraq War.

Publishers in the early 2000s were contracting authors to write books on women and war, gender and war, women and militarization, gender and militarization. Most scholars interested in women's and gender studies could barely keep up with the outpouring of scholarly books. Journals such as the *International Feminist Journal of Politics, Politics and Gender*, the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Security Dialogue*, *Journal of Peacekeeping*, *Men and Masculinities*, *Feminist Economics*, *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, *International Migration Review*, *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Hypatia*, *Middle East Journal of Women's Studies*, *The Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, and many more (not all in English), were providing outlets for the latest gender-conscious scholarship, much of it shedding light on the gendered causes, processes, and consequences of militarization and wars.

Virtually none of these scholarly forums existed during World War II or the Korean War. Some of them did not exist even in the 1990s during the Gulf War or Rwandan and Yugoslav wars. The more scholarly forums there are, each promoting serious attention to the workings of masculinities and femininities, each providing models for rigorous (that is, reliable) feminist scholarship, the more likely it is that accounts of any given armed conflict will take note of women's experiences, ideas, and actions. Once again, the Iraq War was likely therefore to prompt more research than ever before

that would not take masculinized cultures and patriarchal structures for granted.

All the information presented in these chapters is available in the public domain. I have not been privy to confidential or classified sources. This means that any attentive person could acquire an understanding of this war that flows from taking seriously women's lives. In an important sense, though, sticking to what is available in the public domain has been a limitation. Unlike the wonderful Iraqi British scholar Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, who spent months during the post-Gulf War 1990s interviewing women in several Baghdad neighborhoods, and on whose rich research I have drawn, I have not spoken to any of these eight women whose wartime lives I've sought to understand. I did enjoy one brief e-mail exchange with Emma, who lives in Texas. At times, I thought I should make more of an effort to track down the four American women, to have phone or in-person interviews with them. But that, I was afraid, might tilt the whole book toward the four American women. They would have become more engaging for readers, maybe even for me. That would have subverted one of the principal aims of this book: to create for readers a sense of balance, of equal engagement with all eight of these diverse women.

Nonetheless, there are inequalities of public information about these eight women, even among each country's four women. Thus, because over the course of the Iraq War Emma took on increasingly public responsibilities, local press mentions of her activities were easier to find. By contrast, Charlene largely dropped off the public stage. Likewise, by deciding to run for elected office, Shatha attracted ongoing media attention, while Maha seemed to disappear from view.

Nor is there a neat symmetry between the four Iraqi and four American women. There is no American teenage girl in these pages to match and compare with thirteen-year-old Safah. There is no Iraqi military wife here to match and compare with Kim, the American wife of Mike, the National Guard soldier. If not comparably symmetrical, then what is the value of including these eight women here between the same bindings? Rather than comparing the proverbial "apples and oranges," I have found that thinking

about Iraqi and American women together has opened intellectual windows. By considering the experiences and ideas of all eight women, I have discovered I could look into the Iraq War from several new perspectives.

In particular, together, these eight women have made me rethink the meanings of, and evidence for, “the cost of war” and “security.” There is a great deal of fresh thinking nowadays about security, especially efforts to de-center the preoccupation with a militarized “national security.” Taking seriously individual Iraqi and American women can further those useful efforts—to establish new, more realistic measurements, to go to new sites to explore trends in security and insecurity. Moreover, considering the four Iraqi and four American women together I have become more realistic about how the “costs” of any war should be tallied. Mothers’ and wives’ silences can have costly postwar consequences. Girls’ lost schooling carries a price both for each girl and for her entire society. Wartime reversion to patriarchal marriage codes is costly. Official denials of soldiers’ and civilian survivors’ mental health problems need to have a price tag affixed to them. All these costs are too rarely entered into the war wagers’ ledgers.

In a way, I hope readers will feel rather frustrated. I hope they, like I, will want to know more. Did Maha ever feel privileged when she was married to a policeman? Does Kim ever ask her husband to describe what he saw in Iraq?

I have kept a tight rein on my imagination, however. I have not drifted into fictionalizing. Thus I have made no attempts here to tease out psychological inner voices, to attribute emotions beyond what each woman herself has described.

These eight women, as different as their wartime experiences and their wartime thoughts have been, also do not capture the full range of women who have lived through the Iraq War and who were counted upon by governments to absorb the costs of this war. Most dramatically absent from these pages are women in those countries whose governments decided to support the U.S. government’s military invasion and postinvasion occupation of Iraq. Many people may not be able to name any of those “coalition” countries, beyond perhaps Britain. Yet women in Honduras, Australia, Georgia, South

Korea, Japan, Ukraine, Spain, Italy, and Poland also had to make up their minds about what they thought about their own government's support of the Iraq War; many became mothers of deployed soldiers and returning soldiers. Some women in each of these countries were military wives who were expected by their governments to merge their loyalties to their husbands with a loyalty to their husband's governmental superiors. If we ever are to have a realistically complete gendered understanding of this hydra-headed experience we call the Iraq War, we will need to listen to women from all these countries.

Missing too are the women in the lives of the men from Pakistan, India, Fiji, the United States, South Africa, and other countries, men who were hired by the dozens of private contractors who played such a significant role in determining how the Iraq War was waged. Some of these contracted men worked as armed security personnel in Iraq. Others drove trucks along dangerous Iraqi highways, delivering pizzas, DVDs, and fuel to American bases. These men's mothers, wives, girlfriends, and sisters had their own thoughts about their sons and husbands taking these jobs. These women's assessments of security and cost will need analyzing. And we will need a gender analysis of each of the private contractors. Executives of these contracting companies were themselves adopting certain modes of masculinity at the same time as they were honing company policies that were based on gendered assumptions both about the men they hired and about the women in their employees' lives. We need to know more. What would a feminist analysis of Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) look like? What would we learn about the Iraq War by taking seriously the experiences and actions of the wife of a Blackwater male security guard?

Then there is the risk that by devoting attention to Charlene, as the mother of a military man, one unconsciously will slip into imagining that only American women have been the mothers of soldiers in the Iraq War. In reality, of course, Iraq's own post-Saddam Hussein military could not have been recruited and sustained unless thousands of Iraqi women, as mothers of sons, had been persuaded that their sons' joining the new American-sponsored military was safe enough, rewarding enough, and reputable

enough to deserve their maternal support. So far, we know all too little about what the mothers of Iraqi soldiers thought of their sons' enlistment or about any efforts they might have exerted to influence their sons' decisions. Even lacking their American military counterparts' expensive and elaborate media recruiting campaigns, did the Iraqi men at the top of the new military's hierarchy take any steps to win over the mothers of young men?

Likewise, as the numbers of Iraqi men as soldiers—and police—who have been severely injured climbed sharply upward, and as more and more Iraqi male soldiers and police engaged in combat and took part in nighttime raids on civilian homes, how have their Iraqi wives coped with the burden of picking up the wartime pieces of these veterans' lives? "Military wives" is not a uniquely American category. We will not be able to make full and reliable sense of the Iraq War until we know how these Iraqi women assess the war and deal with the physical and emotional burdens imposed on them in the name of waging and recovering from this war.

"Military wife" may not be the appropriate term to use for women married to men in militias, but their lives too call for future consideration. Where are the women in the personal lives of those Iraqi men who joined the armed insurgency, the party-affiliated sectarian militias, and the U.S.-sponsored Sunni Awakening Councils? We need to know how pressured these Iraqi women were to accept their husbands' decisions to take up arms. How much did their own household economies come to depend on the salaries paid by militia leaders to their rank and file men? We need, too, to discover how marital relationships between civilian women and their militiamen/husbands were affected by there being a loaded gun in their home. Just to note that each of these armed groups, such significant players determining the course of the Iraq War, has been profoundly masculinized is useful, but it is not enough.

While the four American women featured here come from four different states—Texas, Illinois, California, and Wisconsin—three of the four Iraqi women come from one city, Baghdad. Where are Iraq's rural women? In the years just before the war, Nimo, Maha, and Shatha did live in quite different neighborhoods in the capital, but they shared the urbanized modernity of life

in the country's largest city. And even Safah, while living outside Baghdad, also lived in a sizable town. Iraqi women living rural lives deserve more attention by analysts of the Iraq War. These Iraqi women were experiencing the evolving gendered phases of the war while living in villages where tribal affiliations carried more weight, where schooling was harder to gain, where disruptions in long-distance transport did particular damage to agricultural livelihoods, where it was a greater challenge to create women's organizations, and where a suspicion of middle-class educated urban women's activism could be shared by both women and men. Feminists have warned us not to conflate rural and urban women, even if superficially they seem to share class or ethnic affiliations. Much of the Iraq War was fought in Baghdad, Falluja, Mosul, and Basra city block by city block. But if taking seriously Charlene's life in small town America can shed light on the genderings of the Iraq War, so too can taking seriously the lives and ideas of rural Iraqi women.

None of these eight women have become—at least as far as I could trace their lives—self-identified feminists or anti-war activists. Still, as readers will discover, both Iraqi and American feminists and critics of militarism are visible here in these pages. Furthermore, those women who did develop feminist critiques and strategies regarding the war and the foreign occupation had their own ideas about women as widows, as soldiers, as wives, and as daughters, and as prostitutes. Those Iraqi and American women's lives—even if seemingly carried on outside the networks of feminist activism—would be affected by how successful or thwarted these feminists and anti-war activist women were in their political campaigns.

Only as the war dragged on did I understand that there is a risk—a valuable risk—in selecting a person early in an armed conflict and then in committing oneself to stick with that person as she (or he) developed, and as circumstances around her changed over the next several years. Often we as researchers select people as subjects of analysis in the latter stages of their experiences or even after they have died, at a point when we can see at least superficially what they have tried to make of themselves, after they have experienced most of what we are eager to understand. In that sense, we maximize our sense of control over what we will be attempting to understand.

We choose Alexandra Kollontai long after the Russian Revolution or Fannie Lou Hamer years after the peak of the American civil rights movement.

By choosing Nimo, Maha, Safah, Shatha, Emma, Danielle, Kim, and Charlene during the earlier stages of the Iraq War—during the period of mid-2003 to late 2004—and deciding to stick with them, I felt a bit like a novelist who explains how her fictional characters start to have wills of their own, taking paths that the novelist who created them initially had no idea they would take, maybe didn't even want them to take. The eight women featured here, of course, are not figments of a novelist's imagination. Each of them, moreover, has not thought and acted just at the moment when an enterprising journalist discovered them and offered the rest of us a snapshot of their lives. Each woman has continued to sort out her ideas, her relationships to friends, communities, and weapons-wielding men. Each woman here has continued to refine and revise her opinions about work and politics. She has gone on making decisions about how to use her limited resources to fashion a life in wartime and afterward.

This research strategy has had consequences. Several of the eight women have made choices that surprised me. I didn't anticipate that Emma's public life would take the turn it did. Danielle's assessment of her military experience in the years shortly after her medical discharge was not according to some preordained script. Similarly, I couldn't have forecast how the Iraqi provincial elections would affect Shatha's political party. Back in 2003, I didn't know where in Iraq Kim's husband's unit would be stationed. When I first read about Nimo, I had no inkling that Iraqi beauty parlors would become a battleground.

It has been beneficially humbling to be so surprised along this journey. It has reminded me that most women in wartime, while acting under severe constraints, do go on thinking and rethinking. The rest of us just have to try to keep up with them.