Title
Cultural Mapping of Violent Events in Baghdad

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DURING MY YEAR as a CSW Research Scholar, my research program has turned in exciting new directions, largely because of the opportunities afforded me through my affiliation with CSW. I began collaborating with Professor P. Jeffrey Brantingham of the Department of Anthropology at UCLA on a digital-cultural mapping project of violent events in Baghdad compiled from the Iraq Body Count data. My expertise in cultural anthropology, the Middle East, and my Arabic language skills helped to jump-start the project while Prof. Brantingham’s experience in mapping and modeling crime in the Los Angeles area provided the project’s technical foundation.
Recently, I was also awarded the NSF Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) for 2011 to 2013, which will allow me to expand the scope of the project while in residence at the Department of Anthropology at UCLA. I will continue to work on mapping violent events in Baghdad, the final map is expected to be one of the most accurate and high-resolution representations of the data available in the public record. An ethnographic component will then be added to the project, from data acquired during a planned three-month field project with Iraqi refugees in Syria in the summer of 2012. Their experiences and perceptions of violence in Baghdad over time and their strategies for dealing with violence will be combined with the empirical data derived from the mapping, modeling, and statistical analysis. During the fellowship, I will also be collaborating with the UC Crime Group, a research team of anthropologists, criminologists, and mathematicians at UCLA and UC Irvine, to develop models of violent events in Baghdad and to understand spatio-temporal patterns.

As an NSF Minority Postdoctoral Fellow, I will also strive to broaden participation of underrepresented groups in the SBE sciences as well as the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), through a particular focus on working with minorities and women. As a Chicana, I hope to draw on my background and professional experience to mentor other Latino/a students in anthropology and social science research. I am passionate about expanding opportunities for social scientists from underrepresented groups outside the boundaries of scholarship centered in identity politics—by advising and mentoring promising anthropology students to work on topics with implications beyond personal identity markers. While it is critical to have a body of insider anthropologists working in ethnic, gender, and queer studies, it is just as crucial to bring diverse perspectives to fields and topics outside the bounds of personal identity. To further this end, I will work with UCLA’s Social Science in Practice Initiative, which strives to bring social science to diverse communities inside and outside the university. I will also disseminate my research through public talks aimed at exposing the diverse Los Angeles community to the potentials of social science and collaborative research with the goal of recruiting members of underrepresented groups from the local community into the SBE sciences and STEM fields.

Finally, I am finishing up an article on the practice of religious civility between sectarian communities in Damascus, embodied through local sociomoral resources that highlight reciprocal behavior and a shared way of life as a component of moral personhood in the community. And I look forward to teaching a course on the Anthropology of the Middle East at UCLA in this summer.

Lindsay A. Gifford has been a CSW Research Scholar since 2010. Gifford received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Boston University in 2009 after completing a dissertation entitled “Nashta: Rotating Credit Associations and Women ‘Being Active’ in Syria.”

Photo credit: Map of Baghdad as of 2003, National Imagery and Mapping Agency of the United States Government, via Wikimedia Commons.