



International Association of Contemporary Iraqi Studies

3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, 16-17 July 2008

SOAS, University of London

Abstract of paper to be presented at the conference.

For details of the conference programme go to [www.iraqistudies.org](http://www.iraqistudies.org)

**Speaker: Ane Mannsåker Roald, University of Oslo**

**Title: The role of religion and the region in Iraq**

**Abstract:**

The paper discusses how the two issues of religion and region relate to each other, and how they interfere with Iraqi politics. My contention is that the religious actors and their connections with counterparts in Iraq's neighbouring states form networks that play a regionalising role and may contribute to the growth of trans-border regions. Since there are multiple actors in the religious sector of society, there is a great likelihood that several regionalising forces emerge, not necessarily pulling in the same direction. Since the issue of regional alliances for the new Iraqi regime is highly contentious, a closer look into these dynamics is warranted.

Theoretically, the paper will be based on work discussing the emergence of New Regionalism, which offers a more constructivist perspective on regions and regionalisms than the traditional studies of regionalism. Not many students of the Middle East have sought to apply such a framework to the regional dynamics of the Arab countries (and their non-Arab neighbours), and the article therefore also represents a fresh intake to the study of the Middle East in general, and Iraq more specifically.

The article is part of a PhD project at the University of Oslo, Norway, and will be based on fieldwork conducted spring 2008 in Damascus. The main empirical source will thus be interviews with representatives of Iraqi religious NGOs and of the Iraqi ulama'.