



Final Research Report

Nadje Al-Ali, Irada Al-Jeboury, Inass Al-Enezy & Huda Al-Dujaili,

Female Iraqi Academics In Post-Invasion Iraq: Roles, Challenges & Capacities

I. Introduction

This report is based on research carried out by a team of researchers located in Baghdad and Amman, supervised and coordinated by Professor Nadje Al-Ali, Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The research team consists of Nadje Al-Ali, Dr Irada Al-Jeboury, Dr Inass Al-Enezy & Ms Huda Al-Dujaili. The project is part of and funded by the CARA Iraq Fellowship Programme (IRFP) which aims to enhance regional and Iraqi research and teaching capacities; undertake and deliver innovative research outputs of relevance to Iraq's future; nurture lasting international research collaborations; and to reengage selected Iraqi academics in exile.

The research presented in this report aimed to explore the specific problems and challenges faced by female academics in Iraqi higher education. In addition, the research project intended to introduce a group of Iraqi academics to qualitative research methods as well as gender as a concept of analysis. Through developing policy recommendations based on the research findings as well as capacity building, the project is also intended to contribute to improving the opportunities for and representation of female professionals in the Iraqi Higher Education (HE) sector. Finally, the project aims to increase sensitivity and awareness about gender issues both within the HE sector as well as within relevant policy circles more widely. The report will provide the main research findings as well as recommendations.

I.1. Research Objective & Aims

This research explores the crisis in Iraqi higher education through a gendered lens by focusing on the specific roles, challenges and problems of female academics. The main objective is to document the specific social, cultural, political and economic challenges female academics face within the current context while also analysing relevant historical factors, which have contributed to the current situation. While recognizing that the roles and problems of female academics need to be looked at in light of the wider crisis and challenges of Iraqi higher education, our research has aimed to

disentangle gender-specific issues and look at possible intersections of gender, generation, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation and social class in terms of appointments, job descriptions, actual tasks, training, access to resources, facilities and enumeration. A specific angle revolves around the experiences of, relationships and tensions between different generations of female academics. We have included female academics who have fled Iraq post 2003 in our research, especially those based in Amman, as many are hoping to return to Iraq once the security situation and general living conditions have stabilized.

At the same time, the research has aimed to assess gaps and needs in terms of qualifications, teaching and research skills, administrative and organizational abilities as well as resources. In addition to providing an analysis of the current situation of female academics, we have aspired to draw up a concrete list of suggestions to contribute to skill development and capacity building.

I. 3. Research Methodology

Our research project is rooted in transnational feminist methodology and politics which denotes a shift from the nationally-oriented second wave feminisms and the clashes between 'Western' and 'Third World feminists' characterizing many of the debates during the third wave in the 1970s and 1980s (for example, Mohanty 1988). It entails going beyond the false universalism of some Western feminisms to consider the particular experiences of those women on the margins of the global political economy, 'allow[ing] for a more concrete and expansive vision of universal justice' (Mohanty 2002: 510). Transnational feminists not only work across borders but often pursue an 'intersectional analysis', recognizing that women's oppression and struggles are constituted by a wide array of structural inequalities linked to gender, race, class, as well as nationality. As black, post-colonial and post-structuralist feminists have argued, 'woman' and 'gender' are not unitary categories and do not represent some 'essence' that is shared amongst women across time and space (for example, Carby 1982; Butler 1990; Talpade-Mohanty 1991). Indeed, categories such as 'gender', 'class', 'race', 'ethnicity', 'nationality' are always constructed, reproduced and resisted through intersections with one another. In the context of Iraq, intersectionality also refers to the intersections of patriarchy, imperialism and global capitalism (see Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009b).

Our approach has been qualitative in nature, based on the recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential "life-world" of human beings (phenomenology). Qualitative research is not merely interested in gathering "facts" and asking "what happened" but tries to uncover the "how" and "why" and the meanings people attach to certain events. Qualitative research is generally used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles.

Gender has been a key analytical category for our research. Gender not only denotes the social and cultural construction of what it means to be a woman and a man but it also refers to relationships characterized by power differences. The concept of gender points to processes, in which hierarchies are established, reproduced and challenged (Al-Ali, Pratt 2009b: 8). Gender is a structural feature that pervades not only all aspects of domestic and national lives, but as Spike Peterson has stressed: 'gender is a structural

feature of the terrain we call worldpolitics...[a] pervasive ordering principle' (Peterson 1998: 42). Common to a wide range of feminist gender analyses is the view that the differentiation and relative positioning of women and men is an important ordering principle that, 'is seen to shape the dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena' (Cockburn, 1999: 3).

In our research, we have combined poststructuralist and materialist approaches to gender: In terms of poststructuralist approaches we have explored gender ideologies in terms of norms, values and ideas inherent in discourses, images and representations by and about Iraqi female academics. In terms of materialist approaches, we have studied the specific sexual division of labour within academia, access to resources, such as scholarship, research grants and training, access to decision-making processes and positions as well as qualifications and skills of female academics.

I. 4. Research Design & Methods

We have used a variety of qualitative methods to include semi-structured and open-ended interviews with 70 Iraqi female academics within and outside Iraq. In addition, the team engaged in participant observation, which has been facilitated by their own involvement in academic life. The team identified a cross-section of female academics with respect to generation, discipline, university affiliation as well as religious and ethnic background. We identified potential respondents through a 'snow ball method', commencing with established contacts and networks in London, Baghdad and Amman. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial respondents to generate additional respondents. It is not an ideal method in terms of variables and representability, but works in contexts where access might be difficult and time and resources limited.

Dr Irada Zaydan and Dr Inass El-Enezy were responsible for the empirical research inside Iraq, focusing on universities in Baghdad (University of Baghdad, Al-Mustansariya University, the University of Technology & Nahrain University). Ms Huda Al-Dujaili carried out research amongst female academics based in Amman, while Prof Nadjie Al-Ali was responsible for project management, capacity building, analysis and coordination. The interviews took place over a period of 15 months from January 2010 to March 2011. The team has been supplementing interview-based research with participant observation within groups/organisations and within social settings pertaining to academic contexts. The findings have been jointly analysed and written up in the process of meetings in Amman and Erbil.

Interviews were transcribed and translated. In order to protect our respondents and to keep the confidentiality of our respondents, we have anonymized our research findings by not mentioning actual names (we use pseudonyms). As part of the research process, Professor Al-Ali commented on the interview scripts after 3 months, then 6 months, and suggested ways to improve the team members' research techniques.

II. Background & Context

The crisis of Iraqi academia in the post-invasion period since 2003 has been wide-ranging in terms of the targeted assassinations of Iraqi academics, the high rate of academic refugees who have fled violence and lack of security, the destruction of related infrastructures, the increasing corruption within academic institutions, the lack of research and teachers' training and the impact of sectarianism on both students and members of staff (Harb, 2008; Reddy, 2005; Robertson, 2009). In June 2008 the list of Iraqi academics who received death threats had reached 75, and those who had been killed 423 (Al-Assaf, 2008), but numbers have increased since then. At the same time, research carried out in the post-invasion period suggests that women's labour force participation and general position within Iraqi society has been negatively affected. While men bear the main brunt in terms of the armed violence, women have been particularly hard hit in terms of a shift towards more conservative gender norms and relations. Many women's organisations and activists inside Iraq have documented the increasing Islamist threats to women, the pressure to conform to certain dress codes, the restrictions in movement and behaviour, and even targeted killings (Al-Ali, 2007; Al-Ali & Pratt 2009).

However, both developments - the crisis in higher education and the erosion of women's rights - did not begin with the invasion in 2003 and the occupation but can only be understood and analysed within a historical context. In terms of the education system, economic sanctions had a devastating impact on all levels, including higher education. In addition to the general economic crisis and economic deprivation, which led to a deteriorating infrastructure and humanitarian crisis, academics were denied access to new books, academic journals and magazines and were prevented from international collaborations and travels. Thousands of university professors left the country seeking employment, or at least refuge, abroad. Those who stayed behind were struggling with extreme conditions inside the universities as well as students who had to focus on supplementing their family incomes rather than being able to concentrate on their studies. Yet despite the deteriorating condition at university and economic and social pressures on students, female enrolments continued to be relatively high, and female academics persistently played an important role within higher education (Al-Ali, 2007, Al-Jawaheri, 2008).

Meanwhile, economic sanctions particularly affected women as they led to a shift towards greater social conservatism and more restrictions for women's roles and rights. As Al-Jawaheri has argued: "[...] the social price of economic decline under sanctions has been to increase gender and class inequalities in the Iraqi society" (2008: 55). Professional women in southern and central Iraq were clearly pushed back into their homes and into the traditional roles of being mothers and housewives. The UNDP report of 2000 shows that from being the highest in the region, estimated to be above 23% prior to 1991, women's employment rate fell to only 10% in 1997.ⁱ Monthly salaries in the public sector, which, since the Iran-Iraq war, had increasingly been staffed by women, dropped dramatically and did not keep pace with high inflation rates and the cost of living (Al-Ali, 2007: 186-187).

These two developments have been accentuated since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the occupation. Yet regardless of the overall shift towards social

conservatism and greater restrictions on women's mobility and labour force participation, the role of female academics has been significant in the current context. Following the Ministry of Higher Education's decree in 2005 to offer employment for all MA and PhD holders, many female postgraduate students were given posts as lecturers or researchers. In a context where targeted assassinations of, and threats against senior academics, were rampant, many senior academics had to flee the country, adding to the brain drain of the previous decade. This has resulted in a situation where about 30 to 40 per cent of Iraq's most highly trained educators are thought to have emigrated since 1990 (Reddy, 2005). Of the remaining teaching staff, only 28 per cent have a doctorate. The rules require educators to have a master's degree, yet one-third have only a bachelor's degree (ibid.). In 2005, about 44% of all academic staff was female, including BA and MA holders who were teaching or engaged in research posts. Although the Ministry's decision has been widely perceived as positive, anecdotal evidence suggests that the policy has actually led to the phenomenon of "hidden unemployment" as many young academics were not actually given proper tasks and roles. Moreover, the sudden increase in the number of young academic staff without proper qualifications and training added to the burden carried by more experienced and professional staff members. Many female academics of the younger generation lack training in terms of teaching as well as research methods. At the same time, female academics of the older generation often feel marginalized or at odds with the younger academics who might perceive the older generation as remnants of the previous regime.

II.1. Impact of Political Developments

The various developments set out above have clearly had a huge impact on higher education in general, and affected individual academics in multifarious ways. The following section highlights some of our respondents' experiences of the past, which appear to indicate wider trends and provide context to the current situation.

Several of our older respondents remember the first decade of the Ba'ath regime (1968-1979) with a sense of nostalgia in terms of the expansion of the education sector, the increase in living standards and the opening of social spaces for women. However, many respondents complained about discrimination and bias related to Ba'ath party membership as well as sectarianism. Those academics, whose families were linked to the opposition, felt particularly vulnerable at the time. One of our respondents told us:

My family was politically suppressed because Saddam's regime had executed my brother in 1981, accusing him of being a member of the Da'wa Party. He was not even 18 at the time. The whole family was oppressed. I could not pursue my studies because it would have required security approvals.

Ba'ath party membership, especially of those linked to the higher echelons of the party, could open up many doors in terms of scholarships, promotions and appointments to senior posts. Samira H. put it the following way: "There

was party discrimination. The partisan was feared. He was the favoured one in appointments and delegations. His opinion was listened to more than others”.

In the context of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and Saddam Hussein's erratic policies, the higher education sector started to deteriorate. One of our respondents, for example, referred to the government's forced retirement policy in the early 1980s, which in the field of medicine led to the loss of a number of excellent teachers. While many academics experienced the general shifts and problems linked to living under an extremely authoritarian regime as well as a series of wars, a few of the women we interviewed were more directly affected and suffered from immediate affects such as loss of loved ones, imprisonment of family members and/or friends, and forced flight outside Iraq.

The sanctions regime (1990-2003) is remembered by all respondents who studied and worked within universities during this period as a time of intense hardship, deterioration of living standards and decreasing quality of lives. University lecturers found it impossible to survive on meagre salaries and largely depended on the monthly food rations as well as support by relatives. Many academics also started to engage in private lessons as a way to make ends meet. Others resorted to work outside the university. Fatima D., who has been teaching medicine for several decades, remembers struggling badly to feed her twins:

My husband and I were earning a monthly salary that did not exceed three thousand dinars. We had twin daughters for whom we were buying milk for twenty four thousand dinars monthly. You can see the difference! Although we had the ration card, which contained infants' milk for every family with young children, the milk they were giving to us was not enough. Therefore, my husband and I were compelled to do illegal work.

Fatima and her husband substituted their meagre salaries with illegal work in a kidney transplant centre where mainly Asians of poor economic standing would sell their kidneys to rich Gulf Arabs. Several other respondents had to sell their belongings in order to survive. Dr Ibtessam H., who is specialized in political science, and works at the University of Baghdad, said:

Thank God that our families - my family and my husband's family - are extended and they gave us a helping hand to look after our children. My husband and I were writing for local newspapers, and we sold our precious belongings and piece of land. We had to struggle against the terrible living conditions and find a way to raise our children. That was our big responsibility.

Several respondents talked to us about the general decline in higher education, both in terms of teaching and research. Iraqi academics were cut off from regional and international academia. As Dr. Nahla G., a lecturer in medicine at Baghdad university, told us: *“Another difference to now was the unavailability of academic references due to the embargo imposed on the country. Teachers had to struggle individually to obtain any academic references from abroad.”*

While all academics, regardless of gender suffered from the various problems and hardships linked to both economic sanctions and ongoing dictatorship,

female academics started to experience the shift to more conservative social norms where women and gender relations were concerned. According to several of the academics we talked to discrimination started the level of student admission. Leila F. made the following comment: “Before 2003, the clear discrimination was that female students who were applying to university needed better marks than male students to be accepted in the same scientific specializations.” However, most of our respondents restricted their observations to experiences of working as teachers, lecturers and researchers within universities. Dr Zeinab F., for example, an older, well-known professor of medicine remembered her difficulties and frustrations linked to prevailing gender norms and ideologies:

I received many invitations to participate in conferences. My female colleagues were going, participating and presenting their researches, but I was not able to. My husband did not allow me to travel. He was repeating: “A women must not travel alone”. I was inviting him to come with me, but he refused, saying: “You are invited because of your specialization. Am I your tail?” In 1999, I went to hajj. That was the first time I travelled alone. After that I attended conferences in Sharm al-Sheikh, Amman and Egypt. In 2000, I went to Morocco. However, in 1999, when I submitted a leave request in order to travel to hajj, the secretary told me that the Chancellor of the university wanted my guardian’s approval to travel. I told the secretary to inform the Chancellor of the University that my guardian was in Najaf [i.e.cemetery]. The secretary replied: Oh Dr., bring your son’s approval, even if you find this illogical.” I asked my son to write me an approval for my travel so that I could append it to my request to the Chancellor of the University.

Several of our respondents echoed Dr Zeinab’s account, and hinted at the shift to more conservative gender norms and relations on behalf of the Ba’th regime as well as society more widely.

In terms of most recent political developments linked to the invasion of 2003 and the subsequent occupation, there is no doubt that insecurity, violence and political instability have had a huge impact on Iraqi society more widely, and affected higher education as well as individual academics in various direct and indirect ways. Female academics have been particularly vulnerable in a general social climate of fear, threats, random and targeted violence and the instrumentalization of education for political ends. While there seems to exist consensus that working conditions have been extremely difficult given the general hardships and problems Iraqi society has been facing since 2003, our respondents vary greatly in terms of their levels of optimism and pessimism what the current situation is concerned. Not surprisingly, many of our respondents who had to flee Iraq and are based in Amman or London are adamant that the situation has worsened considerably since 2003. Lamia G., a PhD in Pharmacology from Al-Nahrain University (formerly Saddam University) told us:

After 2003, sectarian discrimination and discrimination against women started. Deterioration in the university became enormous. Bribes, corruption and favouritism became visible and something

nobody can deny. This led to the deterioration of students' academic level, which is of course a very sad thing. I was in the lecture room of the fifth class students. A verbal quarrel took place between two students. One of them accused the other of betraying the country and the other of sectarianism against Iraqi people. I strongly interrupted the two parties. Next day, the head of the department came and said I must clear this college and close it down.

Lamia G, as several others of our respondents feels that higher education in Iraq is going through its worst period, and she does not see much cause of hope. However, other respondents were more optimistic in their assessment, referring to an increase in scholarships, opportunities to travel abroad and an increase in salaries.

III. Main Findings

III.1. Attitudes and Practices of Exclusion and Marginalization

Our research findings focusing on the current context indicate that there are no legal or official policies that discriminate between male and female members of staff within universities. Moreover, individual academics have received support from their male peers, colleagues and senior administrators on several occasions. However, based on the content of our interviews, we detected systematic practices and attitudes of exclusion and marginalization of female academics. The main complaints expressed by academics of different departments, disciplines and generations relates to lack of transparency with respect to a) training, b) scholarships, c) attendance at conferences, and d) appointment to administrative and senior management posts.

Many of the female academics we interviewed stated that there was no proper system or process in place that would assure equal opportunities for all members of staff, but that the allocation of resources and access to training and scholarships very much depended on personal and political connections. A small number of respondents stressed that they had been supported greatly by a male colleague or senior manager, but even in these situations, it was felt that it was one specific sympathetic and supportive person as opposed to a more systematic and transparent process. If the sympathetic man or woman were to leave a certain position, the female academic would start to feel more vulnerable and unsupported.

While most of the academics we spoke to acknowledge that the lack of transparent processes and proper guidelines also affect their male colleagues, the majority of our respondents felt strongly that they were systematically disadvantaged because of being women. For instance, with respect to scholarships, conditions linked to age tend to discriminate against women who often have to take a career break due to maternity leaves and childcare responsibilities. Fortunately, this regulation has been amended recently and is no longer in place officially. However, older academics with children do still feel that they are being sidelined due to their age, career break and attitudes towards motherhood. Several of our respondents commented on the way university administrators prefer unmarried women.

This was most apparent in the experience of Dr Naila M., who had been working at the University of al- Nahrain since 2008:

I remember when I put an application to work, the assistant university chancellor for administrative affairs asked me if I was married or engaged. That day I was very disturbed and astonished by his question. When I started to work in the university, I realized that they prefer to hire unmarried women and had I been married, I might not have been able to get a job.

As several of our respondents stressed, his attitude towards married female lecturers and wider discrimination is not a new phenomenon that emerged only after 2003. Dr. Laila G., who has been working at the College of Law at the University of Baghdad told us:

Before 2000, there were no female teachers in the college, except one. And I remember that several female colleagues who had high degrees applied for work but were rejected. As for my colleague Dr. Nahla, who also applied to the college of law, she was actually asked by the head of the department to make a written pledge that she would not get married before having spent five years of service in the college. Only then would he accept to hire her. She refused and went to work in the UAE. The dean kept refusing to appoint any female instructors and always said: "I will not appoint a female instructor so that we won't repeat what happened in the college with Dr. R." Interestingly, Dr. R. got married, and after the birth of her first son, applied for maternity leave. That became such a huge issue in the college. As if it was the end of the world! Years have passed since Dr. R. left our college, but the college still refuses to appoint a female instructor despite the urgent need for that. Had it not been for the directive of Dr. Sami Al Mudhafar in mid-2005 about assimilating degree holders in the universities, myself and other female instructors would not have had any hope of working in the college.

Another common thread amongst many of our respondents was the perception of a systematic bias towards male academics in terms of training and conference attendance. As this academic argues:

Priority is given to men, particularly senior men, in terms of selecting candidates for conferences or training courses outside Iraq. They were also favoured to participate in research projects commissioned by other ministries. These lecturers were earning considerable amounts of money from these commissioned research projects. But all these contracts only went to male senior teachers.

This experience and observation resonates with most female academics we interviewed. Dr Boushra H., for example, told us: *"I also felt the discrimination against women in the nomination to participate in conferences outside Iraq. Due to the nature of men's relationships with one another, travels were almost always restricted to men."* Several of our respondents also stressed that senior colleagues are favoured over younger ones:

Attending conferences and participating in researches should be open to everyone inside Iraq, but only accidentally we hear about these. Often, names of participants are decided in advance for the benefit of senior colleagues. However, when the training course or the conference falls outside their specializations, they make these opportunities available to the students whom they supervise, or they might select academics, who may benefit them in particular matters.

Gender and generation tend to intersect in ways that women and younger members of staff are regularly sidelined when it comes to conference attendance and trainings. But most importantly appears to be the perceptions and complaint that universities lack transparency and clear rules in terms of announcing opportunities and selecting candidates.

Cultural and social attitudes about women's lack of competence, assertiveness and ability to lead clearly play an important role in shaping the behaviour and practises towards female academics on behalf of their male colleagues, heads of departments and deans. One of our respondents complained: *"When I was working as head of my department, a younger and less experienced male who was working for me, was always defying me and did not want to believe that I was a woman in charge."*

In fact, most of the interviewees complained that female academics were ignored in terms of the various management and senior administrative posts involved in university life. The majority of respondents stated that there still exists suspicion and lack of confidence about women's capabilities. This senior academic in political sociology at Baghdad university said: *"The Dean wanted to see me and told me that they need me to be the head of department, and I accepted"*. Yet, when we asked her whether discrimination against women was only a rumour, she replied:

There is significant discrimination. They even do not allow us to direct or manage an exam hall. I went myself to the Dean and I asked him: "Why do you not trust us?" It is only after this that he assigned me to the presidency of the Examination Hall in 1995. And then I asked to participate in committees test scores, and I am now Chair of the Examination committee.

On the other hand, several academics who did get appointed to do certain administrative roles were convinced that they were not chosen for their skills but due to the fact that there was no male colleague willing to do the job. Several of our respondents stated that women tend to be appointed to the less prestigious but more labour intensive administrative roles as opposed to roles associated with decision-making and strategizing.

A common experience relates to women's voices being ignored or marginalized in meetings and committees. Authoritarian and hierarchical structures within some departments and committees create an intimidating atmosphere, which does not encourage women's full participation. In fact, several of our respondents felt that men referred to have meetings without

women. Another senior academic who works in biology at Al-Nahrain University put it the following way:

Men tend to prefer not to have women in their gatherings. For instance, they prefer not to have a woman in the College Council, or the University's Council, so that they will feel more at ease. Previously, when I was head of department, I was a member in the College Committee so I know a lot about that. I am not a member of the University's Committee, because they do not allow directors of research centres to have this membership. Frankly, they do not like me to be a member with them in the University's Council because they know very well that I cannot just accept things, and that I do not keep my mouth shut when there is a mistake.

Yet, it is not only the perceived treatment of women by male colleagues that prevents women to put themselves forward for certain positions. Other female colleagues can also be seen as potential threats and obstacles to the academic developments of some academics we interviewed. Competition and envy are powerful sentiments that clearly present obstacles to greater cooperation and solidarity amongst colleagues, even amongst female academics.

Moreover, as we will elaborate later on in the report, social and cultural attitudes about women's capabilities and roles are not only held by many male academics and senior administrators, but also by wider society, including many female academics themselves. Several of our respondents conceded that they would not put themselves forward for any administrative or management position as they did not have the confidence to do so and/or would prioritise family responsibilities.

III. 3. Promotions

The issue of promotions appears to be more complex than the widespread discriminatory practices with respect to training, scholarships, conference attendance and administrative posts. Most interviewees stressed that the guidelines to promotion are clearly laid out, i.e. 3 publications of research for promotion to assistant professor and full professor, and 2 publications for the promotion to instructor. Several of the women we interviewed agreed with the statement by one lecturer: *"I personally have not faced any discrimination with regard to my promotion as I have published publications and it was my right to get promoted"*. However, a small number of respondents thought that the promotions committee and promotions process was also linked to personal relationships and that there was scope for interpretation in assessing and establishing whether certain publications were eligible and of high enough quality. This, it should be stressed, however, is a problem common to promotions processes throughout the world as a level of subjectivity is not avoidable. The question is a matter of degree and of the kind of procedures in place to decrease the possibility of biased treatment, whether positive or negative.

In the past, promotions were sometimes linked to political nepotism. According to some of our respondents, the level of commitment and involvement in the Ba'th party impacted on the likelihood of promotions and management appointments. One of our respondents, one of the first female public health specialists in Iraq, remembered:

I have never felt the issue of sectarianism because my husband was from a Sunni origin and I am Shi'i. But I felt oppressed because I was not Ba'thi and I did not want to be partisan, despite the fact that my husband was a Ba'thi. I was feeling oppressed in my work when I was comparing my scientific qualifications to that of my head of department. He had lesser qualifications but that did not seem to matter as he was committed to the party. Sometimes, I was feeling political and sectarian discrimination because I was in a suspicious position, not being Ba'thi and also being a Shi'i.

However, other respondents pointed out that academics, who were not active or were even not members in the Ba'th party were promoted. Most respondents agreed that senior posts, like heads of departments or deans were linked to party membership and commitment.

It is too early to assess whether sectarian and/or political affiliation are going to influence promotions in the higher education sector in Iraq in the future. Based on anecdotal evidence by some academics, especially those who had to flee Iraq, political parties and sectarian agendas have had an impact on university appointments and practises since 2003, and some of our respondents are worried about political meddling within the university system.

The significance of gender intersecting with other categories of hierarchies also became apparent. Historically, membership in a political party has been significant variable intersecting with gender. However, one of our interviewees, for example, highlighted another kind marginalization in the past. She said:

I also recognized the discrimination between graduates from Iraq and graduates from foreign universities (particularly British). Of course, the head of the department and the Dean preferred graduates of the British Universities. We, graduates of Iraq, were often suffering from the vanity of the graduates of foreign universities.

For female academics, a further significant issue with respect to promotions and the required publications is the difficulty to juggle their teaching responsibilities with research, especially since many also have childcare and/or family responsibilities. We will elaborate on those difficulties in the next section.

III.4. Lack of support structures

Childcare and domestic responsibilities are the most frequently mentioned barriers to women's career developments by the academics we interviewed for this research. Aside from social and cultural attitudes, which are often internalized by academics themselves, it is the lack of adequate support infrastructure that impedes women's greater involvement in higher education.

Private nurseries are expensive and not available to all academics due to limited places and specific locations. Childcare appears to be particularly pressing as maternity leave is fully paid for only 72 days, and then mothers are entitled to half pay for up to a year. However, according to our respondents, a new law is under discussion, which would entitle female academics to 6 months full pay and 6 months half pay.

Several of the academics we interviewed bemoaned the absence of subsidized nurseries, especially a nursery located within the university. Some of our respondents reported that they often had to take time out of their annual leave in order to manage childcare. According to several of the academics we interviewed, senior management at universities do not seem to appreciate the difficulties linked to childcare responsibilities and lack of organized childcare. At Nahrain University, for example, a number of female lecturers with children proposed to allocate one of the university halls as a day care centre for children. The lecturers were prepared to pay the wages of childcare staff. In other words, the university was not asked to provide free childcare but simply to provide a venue. However, the university refused this proposal.

What becomes obvious is that there is currently a mismatch between women's economic and academic contributions within higher education with increasing numbers of female students and lecturers, and the social and cultural expectations in terms of gender roles, namely that women are solely responsible for childcare and domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of the house. Our respondents reported that picking up children from nurseries and bringing them to their in-laws is a task often shared between husband and wife. But while some men do get engaged in childcare, the main responsibility of childcare and domestic duties lies with the wife.

Several older women reported that childcare was more readily available in the 1970s and 80s. This might be related to different demographics in that extended families played a more important role in childcare, but the state was also able to provide more childcare provisions in the context of a stronger economy and labour market. Other respondents pointed out that the state played a more active role in promoting women's labour force participation prior to the sanctions period.

These days, many young female lecturers with families who have not obtained PhDs prefer to pursue their studies abroad, not necessarily for academic reasons but often for logistic reasons as they see going abroad as the only chance to devote themselves to studying. Maha B, for example, who has a Master's degree, argued:

If I would get an opportunity to study abroad, it would mean that housing and other research facilities would be available. I would not have to worry about the facilities or materials needed for my work. I would also not be worried about my children and my husband who might be hurt while we are at home in Iraq. This is something that keeps my mind busy during all the time I am away from them outside the house for work. I know that abroad, there are supportive institutions for the working mother, or for the mother who wants to complete her study. For instance, I would not need to sit with my children for hours to teach them or to help

them doing their homework. I would not have to follow up the loss of this or that food stuff from the market, or providing electricity and other services, like water, or other of issues that we are suffering from daily, including traffic jams and the time we lose daily in our journey to and from work. Therefore, you would find female researchers, particularly the married ones, dreaming of a real opportunity for a scientific study.

In addition to lacking support with respect to childcare as well as domestic responsibilities, female academics are lacking structures of support in relation to academic mentoring. Aside from personalized systems of support, universities tend to not provide organized support in terms of career development, training and time management. Several of the junior academics who participated in this research wished that the university would provide them with more structured information about how to develop their research projects, how and where to publish, how to combine teaching and research, as well as how to combine work and family responsibilities.

The only available structural support relates to political party affiliation or family networks. Yet this was perceived to be a problem for several women we spoke to, as they would prefer a system based on merit and competence rather than personal and political connections.

Another more positive point mentioned in the interviews relates to friendship and support networks amongst colleagues who are valued greatly. For every story of tensions, conflicts and envy, there is a story and experience of support, encouragement and friendship amongst colleagues. Especially younger academics tend to feel more at ease with each other, including male and female colleagues. Some tensions existed within generations, but most tension and distance appears to exist between generations, with some academics of the younger generation perceiving the older generation to be more authoritarian, more distant and more formal. On the other hand, some of the older respondents stated that they had good relationships to those who used to be their students and that they mutually respected each other.

III.5. Social and cultural impediments to female academics' career

Families could be both a great source of support and encouragement as well as an obstacle and impediment for young women who are starting out an academic career. The interviews provide evidence of parents, particularly fathers, being extremely supportive and inspiring to women seeking postgraduate degrees and careers within higher education. This support is emotional and financial as well as social in terms of allowing their daughters a relatively independent life, allowing them to study abroad or to attend conferences and training courses. This middle-aged academic, who has been teaching at Baghdad University, was not alone in stressing her father's encouragement of her education and career:

My father liked one of his daughters to be a physician. He was always encouraging me to study medicine. He sent me to the best private school in Baghdad at the time, which was Al-Rahibat School. Indeed, I got a high average in the secondary school that qualified me to enter the College of Medicine.

The importance families, particularly fathers, placed on education of all children, whether male or female, was a noticeable thread throughout our interviews, especially of those respondents of older generations. Aside from fathers, many of our respondents also mentioned husbands as having played supportive roles in their education and career development:

I had to leave my husband and my son in Iraq but I took my daughter with me when I studied in Britain. At that time, my husband did not mind me travelling alone. He could not travel himself, as he was not allowed to leave Iraq. We were meeting during holidays when he was coming to Britain to visit us.

However, parents and siblings could pose a great obstacle to a young woman's ambitions in terms of education and employment. Many families do not accept the idea of an educated workingwoman. Conservative norms that place women firmly within the realm of the home and childcare and domestic responsibilities continue to be widespread. Some women face these obstacles and try to convince their families, while others accept what the family decides and arranges for their future. Henaa D., a young lecturer at the College of Education at the University of Baghdad bemoaned the restrictions posed on her by her siblings, while praising the freedom her late father had granted her: *"My brothers completely refuse the idea of me traveling alone even as part of a research team."* When Henaa knew that one of our research team's members had travelled to Amman on her own and that her family did not object, she said:

Have I told you that you are lucky and that your family, unlike my brothers, is cultured and conscious? Had my father been still alive, my life would have been very different. My father used to tell everyone in the house not to oppose me or to deprive me of anything. He was a totally different man from my brothers. I miss him very much. I need him now more than ever.

For unmarried female lecturers there are also often restrictions linked responsibilities at home, such as looking after elderly parents, running errands and helping with domestic tasks. Some respondents stated that their parents were disabled or have illnesses, which takes a lot of time from them. Subsequently, they are unable to dedicate time for research or participating in different activities. Many of the single respondents said that they do engage in these caring and domestic tasks because all other siblings got married and live independently. However, single brothers who live at home tend to be exempted from many of these roles. For some of our respondents, marriage is perceived to be a step to greater freedom and social mobility away from the restrictions of their parental home.

At the same time, most of our interviewees are convinced that unmarried women, who hold university degrees or are university lecturers, will have less marriage opportunities since there are few unmarried highly educated male counterparts. Moreover, there is a widespread perception that single men tend to not want to marry a woman with the same academic qualifications assuming that these women would be too conscious and strong, and that men cannot easily control them. Some of the women we talked to believe that the more a woman gets educated, the less marriage chances she has. One

of our respondents, for example, told us about a friend of hers, whose mother always advises her to not complete her PhD in order to improve her marriage chances. However, others don't see this as an issue and some also pointed to the fact that many men prefer educated women, especially if they have good salaries.

While marriage is an aspiration amongst many of the women we interviewed, some respondents clearly stated that they do not feel that they would be able to combine a serious academic career with having a family on their own in the current cultural and social climate. They felt that they had to make a choice between marriage and children on the one hand, or career on the other. Dr Widad S., who works as an assistant professor at the College of Management and Economy at Al-Mustansariya, similar to many of our respondents, also mentioned circumstances linked to Iraq's specific history linked to dictatorship and war that curtailed her ability to combine career and marriage:

My circumstances did not allow me to marry. In addition to my preoccupation with my studies, my older brother was martyred in the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war, just after my graduation. My parents fell ill, and our life turned upside down. The burden was thrown on me and I bore the responsibility to look after my younger brothers. My older sister was married and had her own life and family. All this made me hate Saddam. My parents were ill for along time. My father died after several years. I could not leave my mother to my brothers' wives, because they are very different from a daughter. My mother passed away about two years ago after much suffering due to her illness. Now, I live in the family's house with my married brother.

However, Widad, as many other women in her situation, was suffering from difficult and tense relationships with her brothers and sisters in law. According to Widad, her family was treating her badly and disrespectfully due to her single status and her dependency on her relatives. For Widad, as other women in this situation, marriage had become the only hope to end humiliation and suffering.

Those academics, who lost their husbands early, have to deal with added social pressures and complications. For example, Salima F.'s husband died when she was still young and had a young child. Yet, Salima never remarried and lived with her family. When asked for the reason, she replied:

In my family's conventions – and I come from a well- to- do family – a woman's second marriage after her husband's death is considered a big shame. The whole matter is entirely refused. But you know, what happens in poor families in Iraq, particularly as a consequence of the successive wars? A woman whose husband was killed in fighting would undergo many pressures to marry her husband's brother. These families want to protect their deceased son's children. They consider his wife's marriage to his brother the best solution that would satisfy all parties, including the widowed woman who looks for her and her many children's livelihood, because people in these families give birth frequently and continuously. As you see here, the social and economic situation has the decisive say.

While widowed female academics do not face the same economic struggles as thousands of widows from deprived families, they are still facing many social and cultural challenges. On the other hand, married academics in our sample had a range of experiences and relations with their husbands. A small proportion clearly stated that their husbands posed an obstacle and did not support their work. They felt constrained and controlled by the men they married. A larger group of women, however, stated that their husbands were supportive. What supportive meant in practise was quite wide-ranging: in many instances it translated into the husband simply not objecting to the wife's work, while only in few cases it meant more pro-active help with childcare and domestic tasks. Overall, it was clear that female academics are burdened with more childcare and domestic duties and responsibilities and are struggling to keep everything going. The attempt "to strike a balance" was a common theme.

Several of our respondents reported stress and continuous exhaustion in the struggle to try satisfying everyone around them while pursuing their work and educational aspirations and ambitions. Others were very clear in terms of their priorities, and stated that they are not as much interested in furthering themselves academically if this would mean neglecting their husbands or children. It comes to no surprise that many married female academics with children would pursue PhDs only if they would have more support in terms of childcare.

In addition to the role immediate families play, wider social norms and attitudes also impinge on female academics' experiences, possibilities and limitations. Families who are more open to women's education and labour force participation, often struggle with more conservative norms amongst extended family members, neighbours and friends. A woman's reputation and the family's honour are powerful cultural notions that influence female academics' mobility, particularly their ability to travel abroad.

IV. Conclusions:

Many of the challenges and problems experienced by female academics today are shared by their male colleagues across the sector. Lack of security, widespread violence, political instability as well as political meddling and corruption severely affect the Iraqi HE sector in general. Furthermore, the lack of transparency with respect to access to resources, scholarships, training and conference attendance also poses a problem for many male academics, especially those without political party support. A reoccurring theme was the personalized system of support as opposed to a more depersonalized systematic structure of support with procedures and clear guidelines. Lack of resources and equipment, restricted access to new literature and the overall limited research culture within universities is also a general problem that needs addressing in order to maximise the potential of universities in the region. Finally, the need to encourage critical and independent thinking, engage in innovative teaching methods and research while assuring quality and international standards appears to be one of the biggest challenges for the HE sector.

A common point that emerged throughout the interviews is the lack of a developed research culture within universities. Teaching does not tend to be research-led, and many instructors and lecturers are able to spend many years at university, focusing only on the teaching aspect of education without engaging in any serious research themselves. Several of our respondents, especially those working in the natural sciences that require labs and updated technology, stated that they do not have the actual resources to engage in meaningful research. Those working in the social sciences only have limited access to updated internationally recognized research material and theoretical literature. Language constitutes a significant barrier, as some academics are able to only access Arabic sources within Iraq that are often outdated. Only a small percentage of our respondents are able to read English sources. The inability to access international libraries, which provide electronic journals, E-books etc. is another obstacle in terms of research scope and opportunities. While these various issues affect all academics, whether male or female, for women the added obstacle are childcare and domestic responsibilities as well as lack of encouragement and mentoring. These seriously undermine a female academic's ability to engage in research.

Our research findings leave no doubt that in addition to general problems and challenges facing all academics, there are gender-specific issues that deserve attention and require discussion and action. While there was definitely a range of views, opinions and experiences amongst the female academics we spoke to, we could detect an overall trend that amounts to systematic marginalization and exclusion. The different experiences we came across can be explained with respect to generational variability, family circumstances, experiences with the previous regime and the post 2003 governments, ethnic and religious identities, and political party affiliation (or not), but also specific departments being more friendly and supportive environments than others, and specific Heads of Departments and Deans who might or might not be supportive of departments and individual academics.

The marginalization and exclusion of women in terms of training, scholarships, conference attendance and decision-making posts appears to be a consequence of prevailing cultural attitudes, social norms and practices that are being reinforced by a general social climate of social conservatism towards women as well as widespread nepotism. Many, especially younger female academics, often lack the confidence and assertiveness to put themselves forward, and some have internalized cultural assumptions about women's lack of competence, rigour and determination. Societal expectations in terms of women's caring roles for parents or children pose practical obstacles to female academic's career development, given the lack of systematic support structures.

It is important to stress that many issues related to the marginalization of female academics are not unique to universities in Baghdad. Professor Nadjie Al-Ali has carried out similar research with a team of 4 researchers from Salahaddin University in northern Iraq. This team also interviewed 70 female academics from the following universities: Salahaddin University, Sulimaniya University, Dohouk University, Hawler Medical College and Cihan University. This British Council Iraq DeLPhe programme-funded research generated very similar findings to this CARA funded project. Yet, even within western institutions, like British universities for example, there are on-going

challenges related to gender pay gaps (women earning less than men while carrying out the same tasks), the limited number of women in senior management posts and the relatively small yet growing number of female professors. However, while it would be unrealistic to expect fast solutions and immediate equality, the important point is to recognize inequalities, different forms of marginalization, unhelpful social attitudes and norms and to try to address and change them.

V. Recommendations:

Based on the findings above, there is a list of recommendations we would like to put forward:

IV.1. For universities to create equal opportunities in terms of training, scholarships, conference attendance, allocation of administrative and decision-making posts & promotion. This would involve the following:

- a. Establishment of more transparent criteria, guidelines and procedures that replace the personalized forms of support as well as politically based support.
- b. Provision of university-based and state sponsored childcare centres and nurseries.
- c. Until equality of opportunity is fully established, introduction of quota to guarantee certain percentage of women's participation.
- d. More proactive encouragement of women's involvement in administration and decision-making.
- e. Establishment of Equal Opportunities officer within each university to monitor guidelines and procedures.

IV.2. For universities to more actively and systematically support a research culture and encourage female academics to engage in research and publications:

- a. Introduction of academic mentoring schemes to coach junior scholars in terms of research and publications.
- b. Introduction of regular research seminars in which members of staff share their work in progress.
- c. Encouragement of engagement in international networks and conference attendance.
- d. Provision of university-based and state sponsored childcare centres and nurseries.

IV.3. For universities to encourage culture of critical thinking, social inclusion and innovation, particularly with respect to research and teaching methods.

- a. Encourage new methods of teaching and learning by putting on courses and engage in exchanges with international scholars
- b. Organize debates and seminars for members of staff and postgraduate students
- c. Encourage both theoretical and empirical research
- d. Provide research methods training (quantitative and qualitative)

- e. Organize informal meetings within faculties to discuss academics' concerns and suggestions
- f. Encourage involvement of Iraqi academics in the diaspora (training, supervision, mentoring, short term teaching, workshops, conferences etc.).

IV.4. For female academics to be more pro-active and take initiative in terms of career development:

- a. Seek out opportunities and pursue with determination, i.e. training, PhD, conference attendance, research & publications
- b. Take English language acquisition seriously and take advantage of courses offered at universities
- c. Establish networks of female academics to work collectively
- d. Seek out experienced male & female colleagues to ask for advice in terms of research and publication
- e. Establish links with international professional organizations and networks
- f. Create professional organization or trade union for academics inside Iraq
- g. Create network of Iraqi academics in the diaspora and link with Iraqi academics and institutions inside Iraq
- h. Encourage other family members, including husbands, to get more involved in childcare and other domestic responsibilities

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ⁱ 1999-2000 Country Report, Iraq Country Office, June 2000.